

The Enduring Effect of Exemplary Teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's Most Disengaged Secondary School Students: An Ideology of Hope

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Education at the University of
Canterbury

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2020

Acknowledgements

It has long been a dream of mine to write a thesis that honoured the exemplary teachers I have worked alongside during my career. It is with aroha and gratitude that I acknowledge the people who made this dream a reality, my own group of exemplary teachers.

To Tina Lomax and the board of trustees at my school. I could not have achieved this goal without you backing me every step of the way, thank you.

To the participants of this research. Thank you for trusting me with your expert knowledge, your many years of experience, and your stories. I walked away from each interview humbled and inspired, reminded of why we do what we do.

To my supervisory team. You acknowledge the mana of each and every person you encounter, and it was powerful for me to witness the impact of this. Te Hurinui Clarke. A teacher who exemplifies humility, humour and heart. You valued my experience and my expertise and gave me bucketloads of encouragement and autonomy. Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane. A teacher who personifies genuine care and authenticity. The way you use your written and spoken words to uplift and advance is inspirational. Professor Angus Hikairo Macfarlane. A masterful teacher who genuinely believes in his students capabilities. You challenged me, you pushed me out of my comfort zone and for this I will be forever grateful.

To my whānau. My husband, Junior Mata'afa, and our sons, Neihana and Nikora. E leai se mea e sili atu i lo lou aiga. You are my ultimate 'why'.

Dedication

For my Mum and Dad, Veronica and Bill Maitland. Everything I know, everything that really matters, was taught to me by you.

Abstract

In the short term, disengagement from education is linked with young people participating in high-risk, antisocial behaviours. In the long term, disengagement from education points to serious, ongoing health and social issues impacting individuals, families and communities. Teachers are known to be one of the most significant factors influencing educational engagement. This thesis presents findings from a qualitative research project into the beliefs, practices and knowledge base of exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most disengaged secondary school students. These students sit at the very tip of Aotearoa New Zealand's infamous tail of underachievement and represent the countries most marginalised communities. Alternative education is a provision funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education with a goal of catering to the educational needs of 14 to 16-year olds who are categorised as alienated from mainstream schooling; this specialist field is a focal point in this study.

Methodologically guided by grounded theory and underpinned by kaupapa Māori principles. Data were gathered during a series of semi-structured interviews with experienced leaders and exemplary teachers in the specialist field of alternative education. Former students, who experienced success in alternative education, were also interviewed. The research findings are divided into three key domains, including the head, which refers to what exemplary teachers of at-risk learners know, the heart, which refers to what exemplary teachers of at-risk learners believe in, and the hand, which refers to what exemplary teachers of at-risk learners do. Within each of these three domains, six generalised statements are captured to present the key findings. When comparing the findings from this research to the literature reviewed in this study, some interesting convergent and divergent streams of thought emerge in relation to exemplary teaching practice. Overarching themes include teachers' ability to disengage their ego, to see young people from a holistic perspective, to use time and space strategically, to employ mana-enhancing practices and to challenge young people to see themselves and their world in a different light.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter the rationales and background of this research project are explored. The professed aspirations the New Zealand government has for all children and young people in the education system is compared and contrasted against reality for specific groups of learners. The reality is that learners from our most marginalised communities often do not experience success in school and the myriad of negative consequences of educational disengagement for these communities is broadly referenced. An often-unknown pocket of the New Zealand education system, or alternative education (AE), is introduced and the reasons for making this unique educational provision is explained as the focus point of this study. The potential benefits of tapping into the expertise and experience of exemplary AE teachers is posed as a worthy pursuit in reducing educational underachievement and disengagement of marginalised learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

In situating myself as the researcher in this project I share the roots of this thesis and the pathway that led to working with educationally disengaged learners and youth at-risk. Here, the state-of-the-nation research rationale is balanced with a more personal narrative emphasising the potential impact of teachers' beliefs and practices on educational disengagement and cultural disconnect. Having explored the rationale for this research from both professional and personal lenses, two research questions are posed to investigate the research subject. Finally, this first chapter concludes with a summary of the thesis structure

1.2 Research Rationale and Background

The New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2007) outlines a vision for all students that are “confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners” (p. 8) with a scope that applies to all students “irrespective of their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, belief, ability or disability, social or cultural background, or geographical location.” (p. 6). Sadly, for many of our students this vision is not realised. UNICEF 2018 Innocenti Annual Report Card showed that Aotearoa New Zealand ranked 33rd overall from a total of 38 OECD countries in reference to educational equality (UNICEF, 2018). The statistics show Aotearoa New Zealand sits in the bottom third of for all three stages of education, starting in early childhood with a ranking of 30th, followed by the primary school ranking of 28th and peaking at the secondary school ranking of 33rd. The report presented a glaring illustration of the dire gap between Aotearoa New Zealand's highest and lowest achieving students (UNICEF, 2018).

The term ‘priority learners’ is used within the Aotearoa New Zealand education system to

describe the “groups of students who have been identified as historically not experiencing success in the New Zealand schooling system. These include many Māori and Pacific learners, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students with special education needs” (Education Review Office [ERO], 2012a, p. 4). The underachievement of priority learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand context has serious social and economic implications for our society (Becroft, 2009; Clark et al., 2010; ERO, 2012a; 2012b; MOE, 2013b). Priority learners make up the vast majority of the approximately 4500 secondary school students who access alternative education programmes every year due to disengagement in mainstream Aotearoa New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2019). The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2019) indicated that 62 percent of the cohort of students who accessed AE in 2017 were of Māori descent and 12 percent were identified as being Pacific peoples. To put these statistics in context, the Education Review Office (ERO, 2018) reported that in 2017 Māori learners made up 23.9 percent of the nation’s school roll and Pacific learners made up 9.8 percent. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context secondary school refers to the second level of compulsory education, this typically includes students in their ninth year of school through to year 13.

The 1989 New Zealand Education Act (MOE, n.d.-a) stated that all children and young people must attend school from six years old until they turn 16. However, it was noted in the mid to late 1990s that many young people were not meeting these compulsory schooling requirements (Schoone, 2017). For a variety of reasons, these students had either opted or had been directed not to attend school despite the legislative requirements to do so. In 1998 the Ministry of Education formally introduced alternative education (AE) as a provision for students aged 13 to 16 years old deemed *alienated* from mainstream schooling (Brooking, Gardiner & Calvert, 2009). Vaughan (2004) explained that there are a variety of examples of alternatives to traditional schools around the world. However, “only units and programmes for at-risk young people are now formally recognised as Alternative Education (AE) in New Zealand.” (Vaughan, 2004, p. 8). In reference to young people at risk of suffering the long-term consequences of disengagement from mainstream education, Macfarlane (2007) stated:

“Some of them, however, are caught in the last safety net that the education system can offer them: alternative education in an on-site or off-site centre. A paradox to inclusion this might well be; a reality it most certainly is.” (p. 151).

In order to be formally categorised as ‘alienated’ students must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- 1) Out of a registered school for two terms or more.
- 2) Excluded and enrolment is refused by local schools (including a history of stand-downs or suspension in the past two years).
- 3) Has dropped out of Te Kura after enrolment in either category 1 or 2.

- 4) Absent for at least half of the last 20 school weeks for reasons other than illness and the absence has meant they are unable to maintain a mainstream programme.
- 5) Has multiple suspensions and risks further suspension.
- 6) Alienated. At any one time 20% of students do not have to fit one of the first five categories above but in the professional opinion of the school alternative education is the best option for the student. (MOE, n.d. -b, p. 4).

AE programmes are funded through state secondary schools and can be facilitated by the school itself or the school can choose to engage a community organisation to run the AE programme, by the latter being the most common arrangement (Clark et al., 2010; Schoone, 2017). In 2008 most of the approximately 200 AE programmes across Aotearoa New Zealand were situated away from the referring school (Brooking et al., 2009). Many schools pool their AE funding to create consortia or clusters with one *lead* school taking on the responsibility of working closely with AE providers, processing referrals, reporting requirements and other administrative tasks (ERO, 2011). Regardless of whether a school is part of a consortium or not, the school referring a young person to alternative education must keep the student on their roll, which is referred to as the ‘enrolling school’. Although the student is attending an AE programme, in theory, the enrolling school retains the principal responsibility for meeting the pastoral and academic needs of any AE students on their roll (ERO, 2012c).

Over the past 18 years I have worked as a teacher and head of department in alternative education (AE), and as a teacher and assistant principal in a decile one state school delivering education to learners sentenced or remanded by the New Zealand Youth Court to a Youth Justice (YJ) residence. The residence is run by Oranga Tamariki, Aotearoa New Zealand’s child welfare ministry also known as the Ministry for Children. In the New Zealand education system schools are given a socioeconomic decile band; decile one schools represent the 10 percent of schools with the nation’s highest proportion of students from low socioeconomic communities and decile 10 schools represent the 10 percent of New Zealand schools with the lowest number of these students (Ministry of Education, n.d-c). Although the Aotearoa New Zealand education system is phasing out reference to these socioeconomic decile bands, I have chosen to make reference to school decile in this study because the issue of poverty saturates every corner of this research topic.

The overwhelming majority of AE and YJ learners have histories of significant educational disengagement including truancy, suspension, exclusion and expulsion from schools within their communities. When comparing demographics of students most likely to be involved in school’s highest-end disciplinary procedures and the young people involved in the New Zealand Youth Court,

there are clear parallels; they are predominantly Māori, they are mostly male and the vast majority are from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Becroft, 2009; Clark et al., 2010; ERO, 2012c; Macfarlane, 1997; 2007; MOE, 2018; Schoone, 2017). Being a teacher in alternative education, and in an Aotearoa New Zealand youth justice residential facility, means teaching a disproportionate number of students who fit one or more of the subsets within the Ministry of Education profile for priority learners (ERO, 2012a) and have experienced high levels of educational disengagement. One common understanding about educational disengagement is that it can, and does, lead to a range of unfavourable consequences for young people (Becroft, 2009; Clark et al., 2010; Kemshall, Marsland, Boeck & Dunkerton, 2006; Macfarlane, 2007; Schoone, 2017; Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). Educational disengagement has been strongly linked to poor physical and mental health, increased involvement in high risk activities including substance abuse and unsafe sexual practices (Clark et al., 2010), and is one of the key predictors of youth offending (Becroft, 2009; Singh & White, 2000).

Yazzie-Mintz (2009) described dropping out of school as the “ultimate form of disengagement” (p. 6), this understanding supports the rationale for focusing on alternative education students as Aotearoa New Zealand’s most educationally disengaged students in the context of this study. These young people represent Aotearoa New Zealand’s most marginalised students, sitting at the very tip of our country’s infamous tail of underachievement. The term *at-risk* is used frequently in the literature with variations in meaning. Within the context of this research youth at-risk refers to young people who face significant challenges in attending, succeeding and staying in any form of formal education (Macfarlane, 2007; Popp, Grant & Stronge, 2011) and the unfavourable consequences are likely to accompany this level of educational disengagement. Within this study the terms youth at-risk, disengaged learners and alternative education students are used interchangeably.

During my years educating youth at-risk, I have had the privilege of working alongside a number of teachers and other professionals whom I consider to be exceptional in their ability to engage Aotearoa New Zealand’s seemingly most educationally disconnected, secondary aged students. My anecdotal observations never generated any obvious patterns in the traits, characteristics, ethnicity, gender or age of these teachers. However, some interesting practices and intriguing characteristics started to emerge, and for many years these have sparked my curiosity, supporting the idea that “qualitative researchers enjoy serendipity and discovery” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, para. 36). I have watched these exemplary teachers in action and witnessed the positive impact these professionals have had on young people who had appeared resigned to the belief that they were unable to learn, teachers were not in their corner, and that education wasn’t for them.

This research aims to investigate the mindsets, dispositions and practices of highly effective teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand’s most educationally disengaged secondary school students. Using

a grounded theory methodology, the study had leaders, teachers and former students sharing and describing their lived experiences of exemplary teachers in the field of alternative education. It is my belief that these teachers are a taonga (treasure) to our profession and to some of our most at-risk learners. I also believe that these teachers should be identified, valued and given a platform to share their specialist expertise.

1.3 Situating the Researcher

Fresh out of a single sex, decile nine, central city high school I enrolled at Teachers' College with a clear picture of what type of primary school teacher I would become. In my mind's eye I saw how my students would view me and how fulfilled I would be at the end of each day having educated and enthused Aotearoa New Zealand's future leaders. At Teachers' College I learned all about popular concepts, approaches and catch phrases in education at the time such as "catering to individual needs" (Ministry of Education, 1992, p. 12) and I also learned about planning and facilitating interactive, hands-on learning activities. I clearly remember learning about Sir Mason Durie's (1994, cited in Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 31) *whare tapawhā*, a kaupapa Māori model of wellbeing where social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs are considered within a holistic perspective. My simplistic and somewhat naïve ideas about my chosen profession were about to be confronted.

Early in my teacher training, I realised that my view of learners with behavioural difficulties was different from the teachers whose classes I was posted to. I genuinely liked those children, but the majority of teachers I observed during that time did not appear to enjoy these particular children very much. In 2000 I began my final year of full-time study towards my Bachelor of Education (Teaching). Final year students were assigned to a school, associate teacher and class for the duration of the academic year. I was assigned to a year seven class (11 and 12-year-olds) in an inner city, decile six, intermediate school. In my class there were 32 students in a small, prefab classroom. The children's desks were arranged in five by six rows; with two single desks placed strategically close to the teacher's workspace. I had an excellent associate teacher that year. She was most certainly an exemplary teacher, renowned for her many years of successful practice working with intermediate school-aged students. Because my associate teacher was considered to be exemplary, she was given more than her fair share of *behavioural* students. At that time behavioural was a commonly used term describing students whose behaviour was considered difficult to manage and disruptive to learning. I soon began to realise that before I started 'catering to individual needs' I had needed to develop some fairly effective crowd control techniques. Perhaps not the exciting, fulfilling, chicken-soup-for-the-soul acts that drew me to the teaching profession, but I soon found that these were the measures that allowed me to engage both individuals and groups of learners. I completed my final year and graduated with a degree later that year. However, a nagging thought had already invaded my mind. I had begun to question whether I

had chosen the right profession and wondered how I could possibly take a holistic approach and cater to the individual needs of that many children, how I could possibly facilitate interactive, hands-on learning activities in such a constricted learning space.

My first teaching position after graduation was at an alternative education (AE) programme in central city Christchurch. This chapter in my development as an educator confronted my ideas about education in Aotearoa New Zealand and gave me an insight to a group of learners' whose experience of school stood in stark contrast to my own. I was part of a team of three AE tutors with a ratio of one tutor to every seven students. We were truly able to get to know each student. As one of the teacher trained tutors I assessed and designed learning activities that were specifically created for each young person and their particular learning needs. We were able to lead them to success, to a page full of red ticks, or whatever it was that each learner needed to begin to see themselves as capable of learning and achieving. We developed powerful relationships with their whānau. I met some colourful characters over those years, but every single parent I came across wanted the best for their child. This was our common ground and once the whānau saw that we were not a threat we could work alongside the families of our students to help those children achieve success, whatever that looked like for them. Te whare tapawhā and catering to individual needs began to seem less like a pipedream and more realistic and achievable in my professional practice.

The skills I developed in AE served me well in my next teaching position at a decile one school delivering education to children and young people in state care throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. My first four years at the school was spent as a homeroom teacher in a 40-bed Youth Justice residence. For the past ten years I have held the position of assistant principal at that site. The students were aged 13 to 18 and were remanded or sentenced by the New Zealand Youth Court into the custody of Oranga Tamariki residential services. This multi-agency, multi-disciplinary context provided a unique learning environment where each young person's basic needs are taken care of. For some students this was the first time in a many years that they have attended a state school having slept in a bed the night before, with food in their stomach, free from the influence of harmful substances and they did not have to worry about how they would get to school or meet school uniform requirements. We also had health professionals on site who ensured that health needs are assessed and treated. Our students had access to all types of professional counselling, from substance abuse to grief therapy. The four walls of te whare tapawhā were acknowledged and nurtured. Our students were in an ideal space to learn and we absolutely expect them to.

On deeper reflection my pathway to working with youth at-risk started long before I decided to be trained as a teacher. My father was one of those young Māori males who found himself on the wrong side of the law. In his teenage years, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he was sent to both borstal and

detention centre. At that time both were institutions established to detain youth offenders (Watt, 2003). Like many youth offenders my father's experience of school until that point had been a negative one. He spent much of his school day waiting in the cloakrooms, putting on extra pairs of shorts in an attempt to absorb the impact of the strap he was about to receive. The number of people who suggest a "swift kick up the backside" as a solution for misbehaviour always surprised me, and I wonder if they realise the disproportionate levels of violence these young people experience in their lives. "In a review of child and youth offender records from 2013 to 2017 New Zealand Police found that "80% of child and youth offenders under the age of 17 had evidence of family violence in their homes (and that is just what had been documented)", (New Zealand Police, 2017, cited in Lambie, 2019, p. 4).

Once released from the detention centre, my father met a *good girl* and fell in love with her, who is my mother. Despite his lack of academic accomplishments, my father used his social intelligence, work ethic and leadership skills to provide a wonderful life for my mother, my sister and I (on the right side of the law) as a labourer and foreman. Both my parents had witnessed and experienced destructive violence in their homes as children, both committed to breaking the cycle and, but thankfully, my sister and I grew up in the absence of fear.

Along with his social and interpersonal skills, my father had always excelled in physical pursuits such as hunting, diving, fishing and other sports. Even though my father experienced success in so many areas of his life, his years at school had him convinced that he was not smart and was somehow stunted. I registered his beliefs from quite a young age and disagreed with the conclusions he had come to regarding his cognitive abilities. With all this in mind, it is not surprising that when I encountered the students that the Aotearoa New Zealand education system struggles to engage that I viewed them from a different perspective. I valued the child with the mischievous humour who could be scathing and charming from one minute to the next; the artful dodger who had developed and honed cunning strategies to stay under the radar, or the unfiltered child who wore their hearts on their sleeves and unapologetically spoke their truth whether it was palatable to the listener or not. I believe that from an early age I was conditioned to recognise and appreciate the behavioural students and the misfits whose potential I could see clearly, even when they could not see it themselves.

Compounding the issue of his beliefs about his own abilities was the fact that my father was Māori and born in a time and place where this was not viewed in a positive light. My father's self-view mirrored that of society, and he grew up ashamed and acted to distance himself from an identity that was given away by the colour of his skin. By the time my sister and I started secondary school, in the same city that our father studied but just at a different time, being of Māori descent had started to be viewed as advantageous; something we were proud of. My sister and I embraced our Māori identity, choosing to learn the language and become actively involved in our schools kapa haka (Māori

performing arts) group. My family's experience of societies shifts in view, regarding things Māori reflects many facets of Aotearoa New Zealand society in that it has been churning and evolving since the first Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) stepped foot on these shores. The academic world is no exception with kaupapa Māori methodology and is now increasingly recognised and valued within the academic world. I chose to use a kaupapa Māori methodology in this research project not just because of my ancestral ties, not just because Māori are overrepresented in poor educational outcomes, but because kaupapa Māori methodological approaches and values are so well-suited to the intent and aspirations of this study; namely advancement and change for this marginalised group of learners.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to investigate the potential impact of teachers' beliefs and practices on educational disengagement and cultural disconnect following research questions are formulated:

- 1) What are the understandings, beliefs and practices of highly effective teachers of at-risk secondary students?
- 2) How teacher knowledge, mindsets and strategies can help to engage Aotearoa New Zealand's most educationally disconnected secondary students

1.5 Thesis Structure

In chapter one the important issue that is educational inequality for marginalised learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand context was brought up and its significance was highlighted. The background and rationales of this research project were also supported by way of situating myself as the researcher as a personal narrative. Two research questions were put forth and the chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

Chapter two briefly touches the array of complex factors and influences that lead to educational disengagement. One of the most well-researched influences on student engagement is the teacher effect and is explored in the next section of the literature review. Finally, Sergiovanni's (2007) head, heart and hand framework is introduced, which is used to organise and present what can be gleaned from research regarding the knowledge (head), beliefs (heart), and practices (hand) of exemplary teachers with an emphasis on meeting the needs of at-risk learners.

Chapter three details the research design starting with the two methodologies that underpin this thesis: grounded theory and kaupapa Māori theory. Next, the specific research setting is described in more detailed fashion alongside processes and considerations for participant engagement. The chapter

includes information regarding ethical considerations. The implications and potentials for applying two distinct, but complementary, methodologies are further explored as their impact and influence on data collation and data analysis is outlined.

Chapter four presents the research findings by way of six data stories; one for each of the research participants. Here the participants describe their lived experiences, observations and opinions of exemplary teaching practice in the specialist field of alternative education. Each of the data stories is presented under an adapted set of subheadings determined by the direction and focus of each semi-structured interview.

Having applied a grounded theory approach to data collation and analysis, chapter five presents and discusses the merged and reworked research findings under three key domains. The three domains represent the three critical components of each of the two research questions. Chapter five connects the findings from this research to the literature reviewed, highlighting some interesting convergent and divergent streams of thought in relation to exemplary teaching practice.

Chapter six acknowledges the limitations of the study. It also explores opportunities and poses additional questions for further research. This chapter presents a summary of the research findings making explicit links to the two research questions and considers the implications for future

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The reasons why young people exclude themselves or are excluded from traditional schooling are varied, interwoven and complicated. The multitude of possible reasons as to why learners disengage from traditional schooling is a central theme in this research and gives us a broad understanding of what learners and, therefore, exemplary teachers are contending with at the micro, meso, and macrosystem levels of their worlds (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The complexity of causation is explored in the first section of this literature review.

Across the broad topic that is educational disengagement causation, the pivotal role teachers play in students experiences and success in school is a principal discussion point. The teacher effect is pertinent to this research and is explored in the next section of this review.

Sergiovanni (2007) introduced the notion of the head, heart, and hands of school leadership. This model captured all three major components of the research questions and has provided an effective frame to present what the literature tells us about exemplary teachers. In this section of the thesis we refer to exemplary teachers as an umbrella term without making specific reference to teachers who specialise in working with educationally disengaged learners. This is due to a significant portion of the literature reviewed being concerned with exemplary teaching practice in general:

- The head: what exemplary teachers know
- The heart: what exemplary teachers believe
- The hand: what exemplary teachers do

In selecting literature for this review priority was given to studies based in the Aotearoa New Zealand context focusing on exemplary teaching practice with a particular focus on the engagement of at-risk learners. The next subgroup of studies considered centre on meeting the needs of Aotearoa New Zealand's most marginalised students. International literature concerned with at-risk learners and/or exemplary teaching practice was also considered in this review.

2.2 Complexity of Causation

Within the literature considered for this review much of it emphasises the idea that disengagement from learning can be due to a variety of influences from medical, psychological, cognitive and/or emotional influences to social, home environment, educational and/or community influences (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Brooking et al., 2009; Jones, 2011; Macfarlane, 2007; Snook &

O'Neill, 2014; Watson, 2011). Toshalis & Nakkula (2012) used the phrase “webs of causality” to describe the vast array of influences on student motivation and illustrated the interconnectedness and complexity of these influences (p. 3). Webs of causality also accurately described the complex system of interwoven and interconnected factors that lead to student disengagement from education.

In 2008 the Ministry of Education tasked a team of three researchers with writing a report on the educational experiences of Alternative Education (AE) students in Aotearoa New Zealand. Brooking et al. (2009) interviewed a cross section of AE students selected to reflect the key demographics represented in the approximately 3,400 AE students nationwide at the time. A total of 41 boys and girls selected to participate in the study represented a relative mixture of ethnicities and attended AE programmes in both urban and rural locations across the country. The purpose of this qualitative study was to inform on going policy review in the area of alternative education. The theoretical basis of the report reflects two separate but complementary frameworks: a psychological individual approach, and a sociological ecological approach (Terrisse, 2000, cited in Brooking et al., 2009). This theoretical framework recognised the varied, multifaceted and complex factors identified as contributing to the alienation of these students from mainstream schooling:

“Most of our data revealed several factors at play at the same time — factors to do with the individual child, factors to do with the parents, caregivers and family, factors related to the schools and neighbourhood, and factors related to the broader social and economic conditions and context.” (Brooking et al., 2009, p. 8)

The choice to represent only the young people’s voice in this study was deliberate. These data were not triangulated with school, teacher, parent or caregivers’ perspectives, because it was felt that these other viewpoints were comparatively well-documented. Each of the AE students was interviewed one-on-one and was asked open-ended questions based on set themes: family, AE, health, compulsory schooling, friends, strengths and future aspirations. Each interview was unique, and the structure of the interviews was flexible enough to allow for certain themes to be more thoroughly explored relative to each participants experience base. Although each interview was unique, the researchers soon recognised that there were a number of similarities in the recounts and these key findings were used to title each chapter. Two key themes that the researchers did not anticipate in planning their study was the influence of violence and gangs on these young people’s lives. However, once the authors began to speak to the AE students, it quickly became apparent that these issues warranted dedicated chapters within the book due to featuring heavily in the young people’s interviews. Each chapter documented the key findings, similarities and differences along with a selection of mini vignettes from the actual interviews and, although these accounts are not corroborated, they are powerful and succinct. A separate group of AE

students formed an advisory group who helped in the interpretation and analysis of data.

The study revealed a variety of complex factors that can be attributed to young people leaving mainstream schooling before the legal age of 16. These factors fit well within the categorisation of the “educationally disadvantaged” offered by Natriello, McDill and Pallas (1990, cited in Watson, 2011, p. 1498) as originating from three domains, the community, the family, and formal schooling. Most of the student participants cited violence in the home, gang affiliations, child welfare involvement, sexual abuse and substance abuse as the norm within their homes and local communities (Brooking et al., 2009). In reference to their experiences in mainstream schooling many of the students spoke about poor relationships with teachers, not receiving effective help with their schoolwork, perceived irrelevance of the curriculum and not feeling a sense of belonging at school. The authors concluded that the secondary school sector needs to adapt their approaches and systems to ensure initial engagement for all secondary school students, not just the students who already fit the mould (Brooking et al., 2009).

A notable theme within the literature concerned with meeting the educational needs of at-risk, disengaged youth are the difficulties these young people experience when transitioning from primary to secondary school (Brooking et al., 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). It is noted that within the primary school setting students generally have one teacher throughout the school day for the school year unlike the secondary, or high school model where a student can encounter several different teachers each week. A number of possible reasons can be considered for students becoming increasingly disengaged after moving from a primary school to a secondary school structure. Beyond the effect of having one, versus having several teachers in a school day, we should also consider the impact of encountering a wider range of other students every day in a secondary school setting. Many secondary schools still teach curriculum areas in isolation. Differences in primary and secondary teacher training could also be a factor. Another factor could tie in with Book and Freeman’s (1986) findings suggesting that secondary school teachers tended to become teachers motivated by the influence of former teachers, whereas elementary school teachers were more likely to have more child-centred motivations for joining the profession.

Almost all of the AE student participants in Brooking et al. (2009) had positive experiences of school, teachers and learning during their primary schooling in comparison to their experience in the secondary school sector. Klem & Connell (2004) concluded that students tend to become increasingly disengaged from school as they progress from elementary through to high school in the American public-school context. The authors conducted a quantitative study into the links between teacher support, student engagement and academic success. Using a specific motivational model, the study identified threshold levels for support from teachers and student engagement; this allowed for links to be made between meeting the thresholds and the likelihood of success or difficulty on later student

achievement and outcomes.

Klem and Connell (2004) sought to present information that schools, policy makers and other stakeholders could be implemented and used to improve students' achievement. Of particular interest to this literature review was the recommendation made for "small learning communities where small group of teachers and students stay together for all core courses during the day and for the entire time they are in school" (Klem & Connell, 2004, p. 271). This concept is widely regarded as a significant contributing factor to the success of alternative education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand and abroad (Brooking et al., 2009; ERO, 2011; Watson, 2011) and is considered as one of the key differences between the primary school structure in comparison to secondary schooling for our most disengaged students. According to Toshalis and Nakkula (2012):

"Moving from the elementary context in which a longstanding relationship with a single teacher and a small cohort of peers in a self-contained classroom was the ^[1]_{sep} norm, and into the junior high environment with ^[1]_{sep} its multi-period days, half-dozen or more teachers, hundreds or thousands of peers, and curricula divided into distinct content areas signified what became known as the "stage-environment fit" problem." (p. 13).

In 2001 a team of researchers embarked on a Kaupapa Māori based research and development project titled Te Kotahitanga (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). The project sought to raise indigenous student achievement for secondary school students in the face of significant educational disparity between Māori and non-Māori students in the Aotearoa New Zealand education system. The researchers interviewed students, their whānau (family), school teachers and school leaders across the country with a wide demographic base to represent the many facets of Aotearoa New Zealand society. Māori students involved in the Te Kotahitanga project (Bishop & Berryman, 2009) spoke about enhanced opportunities to learn in "smaller-than-classroom-sized-spaces" where they could interact with their peers and teacher (p. 31). Marginalised students often experience a cultural disconnect from schools. Often these students grow up in families who have histories of intergenerational disengagement and negative experiences of schools and school staff (Macfarlane, 2007). In reference to at-risk students, Sennett and Cobb (1972, as cited in Watson, 2011) referred to a "cycle of lower expectations, poor student performance, and traditional classroom practices creates nobodies that cannot fit into and are not valued in schools." (p. 1500). In response to being rejected and ostracised these students would band together with other *nobodies* and challenge the school hierarchy by breaking the rules in an attempt to maintain the dignity that the establishment had stomped on. Bishop and Berryman (2009) referenced a group of students, interviewed as part of the Te Kotahitanga project, reacting to what they perceived to be unfair treatment

in the school setting. Unlike other students who responded by withdrawing into substance use or truancy from school these students chose to fight back against unfair treatment. The authors described such acts of defiance as stemming from self-determination which, unfortunately, many schools chose to punish rather than understand (Bishop & Berryman, 2009).

2.3 The Teacher Effect

Throughout the literature considered in this review and central to this study, a recurrent theme is the effect teachers have on student motivation, achievement and engagement. The significance of the relationship between the teacher and the student is interconnected and influenced by a number of factors including instructional practices, curriculum planning and assessment, as well as school systems and processes. Due to the complex array of factors that contribute to the teacher effect, the ‘web of causality’ can also be applied here; however, the fundamental message is that teachers play a central role in student engagement and their ability to achieve success.

In Brooking et al. (2009) a number of the AE student participants cited poor relationships with their mainstream teachers as one of the key reasons that their continuation in traditional schooling became untenable. Vignettes of participant interviews (p. 43) captured their perceptions and paint a powerful picture using their own vernacular: “always grumpy”, “strict-as”, “picking on me”, “they over-reacted”, “I hated all the teachers”, “grumpy all the time”, “unfair to me”, “always picked on me”, “teachers just hated me”.

An American study reported similar student participant experiences and perceptions of high school teachers in their context. Watson (2011) conducted a year-long ethnographic study into an alternative school in a city in Indiana. The purpose of the study was to explore how the school navigated the barriers and disadvantages faced by this marginalised group of high school students. Similar to Aotearoa New Zealand’s alternative education model the alternative school was a provision designed to cater to the educational needs of students who had been expelled or were at risk of failing at the local high school; however, the student participants at the alternative school were older than Aotearoa New Zealand AE students. The research looked at all facets of the alternative school including learning processes, relationships, triumphs and challenges from the perspective of the alternative schools’ students and staff. This particular alternative school was selected because of a pattern of positive engagement and outcomes achieved with students who had otherwise been written-off by their previous school. One of the key themes raised by the participants was the importance of strong, positive relationships between students and the school staff including the principal, teachers and instructional aides. These positive relationships between the staff and the students were underpinned by some deliberate instructional practises and school processes designed to maximise student engagement.

Brewster and Fager (2000) also highlighted the importance of the relationship between the student and teacher. Their synthesis of literature in the area of student motivation was published as part of a series of booklets designed to be accessible and utilised by educators in Northwest Oregon. The report looked at the role teachers play in learner motivation and reference Skinner and Belmont (1991, cited in Brewster & Fager, 2000) who stated that teachers magnify students existing level of motivation (p. 10). This theory suggested that in a typical classroom setting students who arrive motivated to learn will thrive. However, students who lack motivation are at risk of further decline in their drive to learn.

Walker & Graham (2019) explored connections between the characteristics of 240 children in their first year of primary school, classroom interactions, and student-teacher relationships. The schools selected for the study were from low-socioeconomic communities and the children were identified as at risk of poor school adjustment. The authors recognised that most research into this area is based in the United States context and usually concentrated on teachers' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship. This Australian study is unique in that along with teacher perception, it gives weight to child perceptions and utilises a variety of other measures. This longitudinal study considered the implications of children's oral language competence, children's ability to self-regulate, children's attitudes to school, and children's relationships and interactions in the school setting. A key finding was that girls, children who had better self-regulation skills, and children who were less hyperactive had better quality teacher-student relationships (Walker & Graham, 2019).

As a result of their research into raising the achievement of Māori learners the researchers developing and implementing the Te Kotahitanga project constructed the Effective Teacher Profile (ETP) (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). The ETP describes two key understandings along with six ways that teachers can best meet the educational needs of Māori students (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Bishop and Berryman (2009) theorised that the pathway to improved Māori student achievement begins with improved relationships with teachers. Brooking et al. (2009) implied that the Te Kotahitanga project focuses solely on the relationship between the teacher and the student, the authors then go on to reference other studies that focus on learning practices and curriculum content that support positive student and teacher relationships. It could be argued that the ETP in fact does give thought to teaching and learning practices. For example, championing the use of a variety of teaching and learning approaches that involve social interaction and students sharing knowledge. Brooking et al. (2009) arranged their research findings into two domains capturing what they believe to have the greatest impact on student engagement: relational (teachers' ability to effectively engage with learners) and organisational (school systems including assessments and outcomes) without assigning a priority of effect. The significant effect teachers have on student success and educational achievement is well-supported throughout the literature, in the remaining sections of this review we look at how optimal teacher impact is achieved by identifying what the literature tells us about what exemplary teachers

know, what exemplary teachers believe, and what exemplary teachers do.

2.4 The Head: What Exemplary Teachers Know

Sergiovanni (2007) described the head dimension of his leadership framework as the “theories of practice that each of us developed over time and our ability to reflect on the situations we face in light of these theories” (p. 20). In this section we consider what the literature tells us about the theories of practice that underpin effective teacher practice with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of at-risk learners. It seems what exemplary teachers need to know most is the students themselves, both as learners and as people.

Macfarlane (1997) stated that teachers getting to know their students is of utmost importance, but for learners renowned for having behavioural issues this connection is even more crucial. Using a bicultural approach Macfarlane (1997; 2007) presented the Hikairo Rationale as a framework for managing difficult behaviour in children in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Huakina mai (opening doorways) is one of seven elements included in the Hikairo Rationale (2007). Here teachers are encouraged to connect with their students, their whānau and the local community before the student even enters the classroom setting. This connection could be initiated with a meeting in person, a card in the mail, or phone call from the teacher. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context Macfarlane (2007) recommends that teachers of all ethnic backgrounds take the time to learn about local iwi (Māori tribal groups), hapū (sub-tribes), and mana whenua (local iwi or hapū that have historic and territorial rights over a particular area of land) in the school’s local area, opening doorways in a culturally responsive way.

By getting to know students and actively valuing their cultural background, teachers can lessen the risk of what Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) referred to as the practice of “subtractive schooling” (p. 14). This is where students perceive parts of their identity as not fitting the school setting and therefore, leave these parts of themselves out. In the face of subtractive schooling students may feel that they need to choose either academic success or to honour their authentic identity with potential consequences that, at the very least, impact negatively on the student’s motivation and engagement (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012).

Getting to know the student outside of the classroom is the first step in getting to know the student as a learner. Knowing students as learners and as culturally-located individuals, teachers are able to put their technical skills to work in creating a learning programme and approach that best meets the needs of the student from a holistic viewpoint (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop, Berryman, & Wearmouth, 2014; Macfarlane, 2007). A number of educational theorists believe this can be accomplished through a student-centred approach to curriculum delivery (Brewster & Fager, 2000;

Glenn, 2013; Watson, 2011). When asked to comment on the pedagogical approaches and curriculum content experienced in alternative education centres around Aotearoa New Zealand, the student participants in Brooking et al. (2009) spoke favourably of AE tutors designing tailored learning programmes based on their individual interests and future aspirations.

Student-centred approaches to learning place great importance on students' unique experiences and cultural context, and make students valued partners in the learning process (Maclellan, 2008; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). It is imperative that students be able to recognise the meaning, purpose and personal relevance of learning activities (Ames, 1992; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Brooking et al., 2009; Curwin, 1994; Watson, 2011). Meaningful curriculum content that is relevant to students' lives is clearly linked to a mastery goal orientation (Ames, 1992). By engaging with their students and communities' teachers gain an understanding of backgrounds, talents and needs and what learning can be meaningfully applied, and viewed as relevant, in their students' lives.

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) referenced learning progression based on mastery as one of the "critical and distinct" components of a student-centred approach (p. 2). Ames (1992) argued that of the two key achievement goal constructs that mastery goals are superior to performance goals. Performance goals have been associated with avoidance of challenging tasks and risk-taking. According to Ames' performance (1992), goal-orientation is closely linked to the learner's sense of self-worth and ability in comparison to others. It encourages a restrictive view of learning where the purpose of learning is simply to achieve a specific goal. The use of superficial learning strategies, for example, memorising or rote learning, are often used in meeting performance goals. Mastery goals, on the other hand, centre on the belief that effort leads to success. Increased effort, therefore, leads to increased success.

Research into the mastery goal-orientation indicates that this approach can prompt a number of positive impacts on learners, including increased ability to engage in self-regulated learning, increased pride and satisfaction, and increased time and quality of engagement in learning activities. Ames (1992) outlined the necessary changes to classroom practices in order to embed a mastery goal orientation and, therefore, increase student motivation and engagement. The author gives specific strategies to help operationalise the mastery goal orientation in the classroom learning environment with the intention of strengthening learner engagement.

Ames (1992) explored the concept of autonomy in relation to student engagement and achievement. The author credited increased student motivation as a result of the autonomy students enjoy in the classroom setting, with a focus on the development of intrinsic motivation and promoting the value of using effective learning strategies. Brewster & Fager (2000) referred to the positive impact of autonomy for both students and for teachers when seeking to motivate and engage students, where students are given a degree of control within their learning programme. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012)

attributed students' feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness as contributing to a sense of self-determination.

Teacher creativity is referenced throughout the literature, both in terms of curriculum content and pedagogical practices, as being a powerful influence on learner engagement. Student participants in Watson (2011) spoke of individualised and creative learning opportunities and attributed their enjoyment of these activities to having input into the design and planning. Brewster and Fager (2000) offered ideas for educators to arouse learner's curiosity and link curiosity with student's intrinsic motivation. Bishop and Berryman (2009) call for "pedagogical imagination" (p. 30) in teachers being responsive to the needs and interests of the individuals that make up their classes.

Within the mastery goal orientation Ames (1992) discussed the importance of planning and delivering carefully designed learning activities, or "tasks" (p. 267). Learning activities should be challenging but achievable (Ames, 1992; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Watson, 2011). Setting learning activities at the appropriate instructional level for individual learners requires teachers to know each students' abilities and needs, a one-size-fits-all approach is not suitable. Schussler (2009) identified opportunities for students to succeed in the classroom as one of the pervasive elements in creating a learning environment conducive to intellectual engagement. However, learning activities that students perceived as too hard have the opposite effect. Within the literature, capturing at-risk student voice in reference to classroom engagement, a great deal of importance is placed on being able to access one-on-one, effective, and timely assistance when learning tasks are perceived as difficult or too challenging (Brooking et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2010; Watson 2011).

Exemplary teachers know their students, design learning programmes based on this knowledge, and understand that a one-size-fits all approach to learning is not conducive to meeting students learning needs. When Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) referred to the complex and unique webs of causality. In reference to student motivation to learn, they pointed out that educators must understand these and plan for the distinctive needs of individual learners. Ames (1992) referred to the student's differing experiences of the classroom settings, each individual learner bringing different prior experiences giving unique meanings to their interactions within the classroom setting.

Using found poetry as a central research methodology, Schoone (2016; 2017) interviewed eight Auckland-based alternative education tutors in a phenomenological research project. The eight research participants came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and life experiences; however, none were qualified teachers. This was a deliberate decision made by the researcher in line with the purpose of the study which was to highlight and honour the unique skillset these educators bring to their work with youth at-risk. During initial engagement with the participants Schoone (2016; 2017) noticed that the tutors used colourful, descriptive language when describing their work in the field of alternative

education. As a result of this noted phenomenon, the researcher decided to use a poetic inquiry method to capture the voices of the educators. The author chose to steer away from comparing teachers and tutors “this was a shift from determining the effectiveness of tutors to discerning their essences” (Schoone, 2016, p. 812). During the interview process the AE tutors discussed the broader definition of student achievement looking beyond hard data such as credits, nationally recognised units of academic achievement. The AE tutors gave weight to the soft outcomes such as engagement and attendance, as well as demonstrating and developing prosocial behaviours. The outcomes discussed, soft or hard, were very much based on the individual needs of the students.

In avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach Frank Smith (2001) argued that time restraints for learning activities and assessment imposed by those who do not know the students or their unique educational needs and are major contributing factors in some students’ being labelled with failures at school. Smith (2001) used the analogy of a convoy to make his point about the individual needs of students within school classes. Many would reason that it is not fair to keep an entire group back so that one or two can catch up, but Smith contends that a convoy is only as fast as its slowest ship. Within this line of thinking Anderman & Midgley (1998, as cited in Brewster & Fager, 2000) recommended students be given multiple opportunities to meet expected achievement criteria. Toshalis & Nakkula (2012) and Smith (2001) are critical of standardised assessment in relation to state or national standards of achievement. Within the area of evaluation and recognition, Ames (1992) warned of encouraging a performance goal orientation when accuracy and an emphasis on normative success are given weight.

Within his targeted focus on issues around the use of time restrictions in assessment, Smith (2001) discussed wider issues that can exacerbate student’s difficulty in the classroom such as the issue of blame. When a child is failing within the school setting the parents and teachers first come under the spotlight despite the fact that it is the education systems, administrators and policy makers who impose boundaries around what achievement looks like and how long a learner needs to achieve these set goals. This factor can put the relationship between parents and teachers under unnecessary stress and can perpetuate the issues the child is having within the school setting. The literature considered in this review is saturated with reference to the importance of powerful relationships between teachers and families, schools and the wider learning communities (Clark et al., 2010; ERO, 2011, 2012a, 2012c; Glenn, 2013; Macfarlane, 2007). Exemplary teachers must know how to navigate systems and processes, designed and implemented by those in power, in ways that limit negative impact on students and strengthen powerful relationships within the wider learning community.

2.5 The Heart: What Exemplary Teachers Believe

The ‘heart’ dimension of Sergiovanni’s (2007) framework for leadership is concerned with “what a person believes, values, dreams about, and is committed to” (p. 20). In this section of the

literature review we consider what exemplary teachers believe about their students and wider school community, and the values they hold and enact in their professional contexts.

Schussler (2009) stated that the belief that students are capable of achieving academic success is one of the pervasive elements in creating a classroom conducive to learner engagement. The wider literature tells us that faith in their students' capability to learn and achieve is at the centre of what exemplary teachers believe. Although this belief sits at the heart of exemplary teachers of all age groups and contexts it appears even more important for teachers of at-risk or marginalised students (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Bishop & Berryman (2009) discussed a key finding within the Te Kotahitanga project being the clear link between teacher deficit thinking and negative student experiences of school. The authors put forward that teachers who, knowingly or unknowingly, demonstrate underlying deficit thinking in relation to their students are likely to elicit poor behaviour and engagement from those students. On the other hand, teachers who genuinely view students and their families in a positive light, with nondeficit thinking, are likely to foster effective learning relationships and constructive interactions with learners. Further to the benefits to student and teacher relationships, a nondeficit perspective is conducive to teachers' belief in themselves as competent practitioners with the ability to positively impact their learners' lives (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Walker (2008) named positivity as one of the pervasive characteristics of an effective teacher and Macfarlane (2007) called on teachers to "exude a passion for their work" (p. 162).

In line with the theme of teacher belief in student ability Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) recommended educators move from a behaviourist to a constructivist orientation. Within the behaviourist approach students are passive participants while teachers lead and direct the learning process and activities. The constructivist approach sees students as active partners in their learning, their personal experiences are valued and reflected in the curriculum and teachers act as facilitators of learning. In reference to Māori students and their preferred learning styles Bishop and Berryman's (2009) Effective Teacher Profile sits well within the constructivist orientation in reference to two of its key elements: *wānanga* and *ako*. Here teachers are encouraged to employ a variety of teaching strategies including offering opportunities for learners to interact with their teacher and their peers to share existing knowledge and co-construct new learning.

When teachers genuinely believe in their students' capacity to be effective partners in their own education authentic student voice becomes a natural and logical component of daily classroom practice. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) identified student voice as a vital component of a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, within their paper student voice is considered a fundamental application of motivation and engagement. Yazzie-Mintz (2009) also placed significant importance on student voice and the value of what can be learnt from listening to students. Flynn (2014) referenced an abundance

of literature centring on the positive implications for embracing student voice but notes a deficit in the specific focus area of students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. A key theme throughout the article is the potential for student voice to benefit all students, recognising all students as expert voices in transformational change. In the concluding comments the researcher outlined the implications of this study in relation to methodologies that can support students with SEBD in the school setting (Flynn, 2014).

Exemplary teachers rejected deficit theorising and genuinely believe in their students' ability to be active participants in their own education, as an extension to this mindset these teachers have high expectations of their students. The literature gives a clear message that students are more likely to be engaged in learning when teachers set high, clear and fair expectations (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Clark et al., 2010; Glenn, 2013; Klem & Connell, 2004; Macfarlane, 2007; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Schoone, 2017; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Walker, 2008; Watson 2011). One of the AE student participants in Brooking et al. (2009) shared her experience of low expectations, "the maths teacher - she thought I was the type of girl who wouldn't achieve anything. For two years I didn't do much maths." (p. 43). Another student spoke of the pitfalls of, albeit well-intentioned, lowering of expectations, this young man "did have a deal with one teacher that I could eat and listen to music if I did my work, but it didn't really work – other classmates got jealous and I didn't really do any work" (Brooking et al., 2009, p. 47).

Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) defined self-determination theory as students' perceptions of their own efficacy in school, and "highly teachable" self-regulation theory as what students do to support their own educational achievement (p. 20). Curwin (1994) stressed the importance of tackling at-risk student's attitudes towards learning rather than focusing on the content of what these learners are covering in school. The author gives practical and accessible advice for teachers and schools to employ with the intended outcome being increased student engagement. Curwin (1994) believed that at-risk students have lost hope and that teachers can remedy this by implementing 10 suggestions of how to develop *hopeful attitudes* for at-risk students. While placing importance on teachers and schools fostering personal connections with students, the majority of suggested strategies focus on building students' efficacy in the classroom with targeted curriculum planning and instructional practices.

As evidenced in the literature, teachers play an important role in young people's educational success and, therefore, all of the far-reaching outcomes linked to engagement in school. Despite the importance of the role, and the serious issues teachers are required to deal with, studies point to a sense of humour as one of the characteristics effective teachers exhibit (Brewster & Fager, 2000; ERO, 2011; Macfarlane, 2007; Schoone, 2017; Walker, 2008; Watson, 2011). Bishop and Berryman (2009) suggested that accepting and appreciating Māori student sense of humour is one way that teachers can

support students sense of belonging in allowing these students to be themselves in the classroom setting. According to Walker (2008), a sense of humour shows students that a teacher does not take everything too seriously, in this way teachers are encouraged to use humour to ease tension in challenging situations and to laugh alongside the students. Schoone (2017) found that alternative education tutors “use humour artfully for de-escalation and distancing in challenging situations” (p. 127). Teacher use of humour can be effective but Macfarlane (2007) warned that humour should be used carefully and never in the form of sarcasm or used to shame students.

“Joy is an attitude or a belief, which soothes even in the most sorrowful of situations. Joy comes from within; it is an internal view.” (MacDonald, n.d. para. 5). In developing an Alternative Education Tutor Practice framework, Schoone (2017) identified ‘joy’ as one of the central characteristics of AE tutors, this is portrayed as “approaching young people with ease, joy and humour helps tutors create an attractive learning atmosphere” (Schoone, 2017, p. 127). Within the alternative education context tutor joy is credited with developing more positive relationships, strengthened engagement through playfulness, challenging world views and inspiring change (Schoone, 2017).

Alongside a sense of humour Walker (2008) identified the ability to admit their mistakes as one of the characteristics of effective teachers, for example apologising when mistakenly accusing a student of a misdemeanour. Being able to admit when they are wrong also reinforces a teacher’s humility and helps students to connect with their teacher as a person with flaws like any other.

2.6 The Hand: What Exemplary Teachers Do

Within the context of exemplary teaching Sergiovanni’s (2007) concept of the ‘hand’ of leadership refers to the actions, decisions and behaviours teachers exhibit in their professional environments and practice. In this section we consider what the literature tells us about what exemplary teachers do to establish a learning environment and culture that is optimal for student engagement and educational success with a particular focus on how this can be achieved for at-risk learners.

As a result of many years of working with his undergraduate students, Walker (2008) identified and presented what he considers to be the twelve “outstanding characteristics of their most effective teachers” (p. 61). These characteristics represent the reoccurring themes that pre-service teachers described in assignments based on their own experiences and observations of exemplary teachers. Over approximately 15 years Walker (2008) captured the ideas of more than 1000 students from a wide demographic base. The one thing all these undergraduate students had in common was their engagement in tertiary education, therefore it can be assumed that very few at-risk learners participated in the study. However, a number of the characteristics identified in this list correlate with descriptions of what exemplary teachers of at-risk learners do well. One such example is characteristic of seven teachers

cultivate a sense of belonging (Brooking et al., 2009; ERO, 2011; Jones, 2011; Popp et al., 2011; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Walker, 2008).

Immersed within and linked to the importance, placed on teachers fostering a sense of belonging, the literature has highlighted the benefits for engagement and learning when teachers' pay attention to the learning environment. When considering the influences on student motivation Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) reminded the reader that students exist within a "dynamic ecology" (p. 3) constantly responding to their environment, for better or for worse. Bishop and Berryman (2009) and Watson (2011) outlined the importance that students place on teachers being organised and well prepared for classes. Klem and Connell (2004) found that students identified increased engagement in classrooms where teachers were perceived as creating a caring, well-structured learning environment. Exemplary teachers recognise the importance of strategically establishing learning environments that support their students' individual pastoral and learning needs.

The AE student participants in Brooking et al. (2009) felt that the staff at their AE programmes provided a safe place where they could begin to start to address some of the underlying causes and behaviours that had led them to leave mainstream schooling. They linked this sense of safety and protection in these settings with increased engagement, both academically and socially. Interestingly, these young people acknowledged the AE centres firm boundaries, rules and structures as a major contributing factor in creating and maintaining this sense of security. On the surface, the idea that young people who are identified as exhibiting some of the most serious behaviours in the Aotearoa New Zealand secondary school system prefer strict, explicit boundaries and behavioural expectations seems counterintuitive. This finding is consistent with other studies in Aotearoa New Zealand concerned with raising the achievement of marginalised students (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Macfarlane, 2007). *Ngā whakapiritanga* is one of six ways that teachers can best meet the needs of Māori learners as identified in the Effective Teacher Profile (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). This concept translates to "creating a secure, well-managed learning environment" (p. 30). In their conversations with secondary aged students from around Aotearoa New Zealand Bishop and Berryman (2009) found that "students did not appreciate chaotic classrooms any more than did their teachers. The effective teachers and the students spoke of the strong desire for and necessity of the boundaries, rules and organisation fundamental to effective learning" (p. 30). Popp et al. (2011) linked chaotic classrooms with increased anxiety for transient students settling into new schools and Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) described the benefits of noise cancelling for activities that require complex thinking.

Learners of Pacific Island descent are one of the marginalised groups subsumed in the Aotearoa New Zealand Ministry of Education's profile of priority learners (ERO, 2012a). The terms Pasifika or Pacific peoples refers to the multi-ethnic, heterogeneous group of people who have migrated

from, or have ancestral connections to the different Pacific island nations. This diverse community represents numerous languages and cultural practices, although, it is acknowledged that there are a number of commonly held beliefs and values within the wider group referred to as Pasifika (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau, 2001). The management of the learning environment is an important issue from a Pasifika perspective. An authoritarian approach underpins many Pacific cultures in relation to interactions between adults and children and this may be the reason for Pasifika learner's tendency to respond better to teachers with strong classroom management skills. A teacher's ability to manage a classroom is very important to many Pasifika students, teachers who allow poor behaviour and disrespect are often deemed ineffective and unworthy of the respect for some Pasifika students (Bishop, Berryman, & Wearmouth, 2014; Fletcher et al., 2009; Macfarlane, 2007; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Spiller, 2012).

Using a bicultural approach, Macfarlane (2007) presented the Hikairo Rationale as a framework for managing difficult behaviour in children in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. One of the seven elements of the Hikairo Rationale is *ihi* (being assertive) and is presented as being one of the most effective strategies that teachers can employ in dealing with serious behavioural issues in the classroom setting. Macfarlane (2000) stressed that assertiveness must be balanced with *aro*ha signifying "cooperation, understanding, reciprocity and warmth" (p. 23).

With the knowledge that a one-size-fits-all approach does not best serve learners, exemplary teachers can enact this knowledge in a number of ways. Schussler (2009) suggested that teachers offer flexible avenues for learning to occur. Within the Effective Teacher Profile section titled *ngā whakapiritanga* (creating a secure, well-managed learning environment) Bishop and Berryman (2009) described flexible use of the curriculum to create learning opportunities in response to student driven learning objectives.

Beyond curriculum content, Watson (2011) explained the positive impact flexibility has on learners from a different perspective in a context comparable to Aotearoa New Zealand's alternative education model. Students in the alternative school describe the inflexibility they encountered in traditional high school when it came to their responsibilities outside the school setting. One young person needed to work two jobs on top of fulltime school to help his family make ends meet and another was required to care for younger siblings while their mother worked long hours. These responsibilities were not conducive to engagement in their traditional high school setting but were accommodated in the much more flexible alternative school's structure (Watson, 2011). Here we are considering more about what exemplary school systems do rather than what exemplary teachers do with such decisions often dictated by the powers that be, not the practitioners.

In establishing a sense of belonging, Ames (1992) identified social comparison and the use of

rewards as counterproductive with the added risk of encouraging a performance goal orientation. Brewster and Fager (2000) suggested evaluating tasks, not students, and also recommend teachers take care not to compare students to others. The authors also advised that educators use rewards sparingly, but make sure to praise and always respond positively to questions from learners. Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) discussed the use of praise to motivate students and how this can be both beneficial and detrimental. When assessing and evaluating learning tasks Brewster and Fager (2000) advised teachers return student work with clear guidelines for achievement and completion.

Exemplary teachers demonstrate genuine care for their students (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Glenn, 2013; Macfarlane, 2007; Schoone, 2016; 2017; Walker 2008). Teachers who care for their students sincerely like, value, and show their students respect. Respect is shown when teachers make the effort to get to know students and their families and ensure that students see their identities reflected in the learning environment and curriculum (Macfarlane, 2007). Glenn (2013) suggested that when students sense that their teachers care for them that they are more likely to display optimal learning behaviours. Other ways that teachers can demonstrate care for students is to be compassionate and forgiving (Walker, 2008). At-risk students often arrive in a teacher's classroom accompanied with comprehensive and well-established reputations for disengagement and poor behaviour in the classroom setting (Macfarlane, 2007). Macfarlane (2007) called on teachers to embrace the underlying ideals and intent of inclusive education practices and to look beyond the surface behaviours presenting in classrooms to consider the underlying causes.

2.7 Summary

The reasons why learners disengage from education are numerous, complex and unique to individual students (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Brooking et al., 2009; Jones, 2011; Macfarlane, 2007; Watson, 2011). Looking beyond the causes of educational disengagement, the negative impact it can have on young people's lives is far-reaching and points to both short and long term, possibly intergenerational, health and social issues (Becroft, 2009; Clark et al., 2010). Amongst the many influences thought to contribute to this issue the impact teachers have on engagement is identified in the literature as one of the most powerful contributing factors (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Brooking et al., 2009; Glenn, 2013; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Walker & Graham, 2019; Watson, 2011). Within this review exemplary teacher practice is arranged into three categories based on Sergiovanni's (2007) model of the head, heart and hands of leadership refer to what exemplary teacher of at-risk learners know, believe, and do.

The literature has suggested that getting to know students, from a holistic viewpoint, enables teachers to cater to individual needs (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2007). A student-centred approach to curriculum delivery is identified as best practice for educators (Brewster

& Fager, 2000; ERO, 2012a; Glenn, 2013; Watson, 2011). Ames (1992) and Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) asserted that a mastery goal-orientation is fundamental to the student-centred approach to teaching and learning. Positioning learning within this approach requires students to be given autonomy in the classroom (Ames, 1992; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012), learning activities should be carefully designed to maximise engagement and motivation to learn (Ames, 1992; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Watson, 2011), and therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning is rejected (Ames, 1992; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Schoone, 2016; 2017; Smith, 2001; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

Exemplary teachers of at-risk learners believe that their students are capable of achieving success (Schussler, 2009) and view learners through a nondeficit lens (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Within a constructivist approach Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) recommended that providing scope for students to become active partners in their own learning journey, embedded in this approach is the belief that students are capable and, accordingly, are given an authentic voice in the classroom setting (Flynn, 2014; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Yazzie-Mintz, 2009). Aligned with belief in student capability the positive impact of teachers having high expectations of their students is found throughout the literature (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Clark et al., 2010; Glen, 2013; Klem and Connell, 2004; Macfarlane, 2007; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Schoone, 2017; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Walker, 2008; Watson 2011). Exemplary teachers of at-risk learners often demonstrate a well-considered sense of humour and humility in their classroom interactions (Macfarlane, 2007; Schoone, 2016; 2017; Walker, 2008).

What exemplary teachers do in their practice is built on a foundation of what they know and believe as people and as practitioners. Fostering a sense of belonging is identified as one of the most important things a teacher can do for all students but with particular impact on marginalised students (Brooking et al., 2009; ERO, 2011; Jones, 2011; Popp et al., 2011; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Walker, 2008). Effective teachers give particular attention to the learning environment. According to the literature, a well-managed classroom is regarded as one that is safe, secure, with clear behavioural expectations and boundaries (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Brooking et al., 2009; Macfarlane, 2007; Popp et al., 2011). The careful and thoughtful use of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, including rewards and praise was discussed by Brewster and Fager (2000) and Toshalis and Nakkula (2012). The impact of genuine care for students has been discussed in relation to exemplary teacher practice (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Glenn, 2013; Macfarlane, 2007; Schoone, 2017; Walker 2008). As a direct result of care, students feel respected and valued creating the optimal platform for student engagement and educational success.

There are a number of similarities and commonalities when comparing what the literature tells

us about exemplary teaching practice from New Zealand and around the world. There are also parallels in reference to teaching students in general and those learners considered ‘at-risk’. However, many of these characteristics and practices of exemplary teachers are noted as being particularly powerful in engaging youth at-risk. One such example being Macfarlane (1997; 2007) emphasising the importance of knowing students both inside and outside the classroom, teachers knowing their students beyond the classroom setting will benefit all learners but is particularly powerful for at-risk students. Bishop and Berryman (2009) also discussed that believing in student capacity to learn and achieve as important for teachers of any students but particularly important for teachers of at-risk or marginalised learners.

It was not difficult to access research specific to the Aotearoa New Zealand context concerning learner engagement, behaviour support, and meeting the needs of marginalised learners. However, there was relatively little literature dedicated to meeting the specific needs of Aotearoa New Zealand’s highest end disengaged secondary school students as a cohort. The vast majority of New Zealand’s most disengaged secondary aged students fit one or more of the four groups subsumed in the Ministry of Education’s profile of priority learners: Māori learners, learners of Pacific descent, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and students with special education needs (ERO, 2012a).

Much of the current research is restricted to one or two of these subgroups and is often not specific to the focus age band for this study; that is secondary school aged students. In the few studies specific to Aotearoa New Zealand’s most disengaged secondary school students, exemplary teacher practice is implied, in that it is the opposite of the negative teacher experiences of these young people. However, one New Zealand study closely aligns with this research topic, Schoone (2016; 2017) researched and published findings into the pedagogy of non-teacher trained alternative education tutors within a large alternative education provider based in Auckland, New Zealand. The decision to focus the research on AE tutors who are not formally trained teachers sits at the heart of the purpose of this project. Using a found poetry methodology Schoone (2017) generated a tutor practice framework from his discussions with alternative education tutors. Schoone (2017) advocated for tutors to be recognised as transformational educators of 21st century learners. Although these tutors are not formally trained as educators, Schoone posited that they have much to offer the wider New Zealand education system.

Aotearoa New Zealand’s appalling educational outcomes for our most marginalised learners, particularly in reference to secondary school aged students demands our attention (UNICEF, 2018). Bishop and Berryman (2009) called for teachers to view learners through a nondeficit lens so too does this research seek to reject deficit theorising. Using a strengths-based approach present research sought to highlight exemplary practice and avoid, whenever possible, assigning blame.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the suitability and synergetic potential of the two qualitative methodological approaches employed simultaneously in this study, namely grounded theory and kaupapa Māori theory. The specific research setting is described as is the process and considerations for recruiting and engaging with participants. The ethical considerations for this research project are explored and explained in specific reference to protecting the anonymity and privacy of the research participants, informed consent, and beneficence. Grounded theory and kaupapa Māori methodologies guide and form the research design, method and approach to data analysis which are all described in this chapter.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Qualitative Discourse and the Braided River

In considering the webs of causality that underpin educational disengagement, and the complex and multifaceted role teachers play in affecting student experience of the education system, we realised that there is no silver bullet and no stagnant reality. Alton-Lee & Nuthall (1990) suggested that paradigms associated with quantitative methodologies are “both theoretically and practically inadequate for understanding the complex interactions that take place between students and their teachers and the ways in which the students’ lives are affected by their school experience.” (p. 548). In the absence of concrete variables, and absolute truth (Patton, 2002), this research utilised an interpretive qualitative paradigm to glean insight into the characteristics and practices of teachers who have had a powerful impact on Aotearoa New Zealand’s most disengaged learners.

On the surface, current research is concerned with teachers and their practice; however, the participants and I share a common understanding that present research is primarily concerned with the needs and interests of this country’s most marginalised young people. This social justice-based research project employs both kaupapa Māori and grounded theory methods of inquiry, based on Macfarlane and Macfarlane’s (2014) metaphor of a braided river as a framework “where a convergence of both streams of epistemology is likely to be more powerful than either one on its own” (para. 7). Macfarlane (2012) offered a graphic depiction of the ways in which Māori and Western epistemologies, specifically kaupapa Māori and grounded theories, can coexist and guide research. Here, we see the complementary approaches, methods and principles of both methodologies underpinned by the three Treaty of Waitangi (Aotearoa New Zealand’s founding document) principles including partnership, protection, and participation (p. 115).

At the forefront of both kaupapa Māori methodology and grounded theory inquiry is the desire to address issues of equity and social justice (Bainbridge, McCalman, Redman-MacLaren & Whiteside, 2019; Berryman, SooHoo & Nevin, 2013; Denzin, 2010; Smith, 1999). Within a kaupapa Māori approach the researcher and the participants are regarded as partners in the co-design of research and the co-construction of new knowledge (Berryman et al., 2013; Bishop, 1999). Charmaz (1996) described an approach to grounded theory where the researcher is exploring and constructing new theory alongside the research participants from the outset within a simultaneous process of data collection and analysis particular to this research methodology. Within an indigenous grounded theory inquiry approach Denzin (2010) describes the researcher as “characterized by the absence of a need to be in control” (p. 299). This researcher’s characteristic reflects Bishop’s (1999) call for research to be participant-driven within a culturally responsive, kaupapa Māori approach.

3.2.2 Kaupapa Māori Theory

A significantly disproportionate number of disengaged learners in the Aotearoa New Zealand context are of Māori descent (Brooking et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2010; ERO, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Macfarlane, 2007; MOE, 2018; Schoone, 2017). Kaupapa Māori theory underpins this research in sync with trends in indigenous educational research that move away from deficit theorising and towards theoretical frameworks that support the active advancement and change for minority groups (Bishop, 1999; Eketone, 2008). Kaupapa Māori paradigm recognises the unique perspective of Māori in reference to language, culture, beliefs and values and the historical developments that have contributed to its growing usage and recognition in the academic world (Eketone, 2008; Macfarlane, Macfarlane & Curtis, 2019; Mahuika, 2008; Nepe, 1991). As a theoretical framework it is concerned with driving positive change for Māori people and their communities (Eketone, 2008). Kaupapa Māori theory is often linked with both critical theory and constructivist view whilst seeking to make research more accessible and meaningful for Māori people (Eketone, 2008).

Macfarlane (2003) identified education as one of four domains requiring urgent attention “because they are sites of crises for Māori. In these sites kaupapa Māori approaches to research strive to make a positive difference for Māori individuals and communities” (p. 89). There are a number of reasons why a kaupapa Māori methodology was employed for this research project. Māori are the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, the setting of this research project. The study deals with a unique cohort of students of whom more than 60 percent identify as Māori (MOE, 2019). Five of the six research participants are of Māori descent, as am I. However, values, principles and practices of a culturally responsive approach to research, make a kaupapa Māori methodology the obvious foundation to establish this thesis on. Central to this research is the belief that the participants are experts in the area of educationally disengaged learners in the New Zealand context. These experts have walked beside me, directing and informing every aspect of the project as co-constructors of knowledge.

Due to the research context, subject and participants Māori words and phrases are used throughout this thesis, particularly within chapter four where the participant's data stories are presented. Here we find Māori language scattered throughout the interview transcripts. Although brief translations are offered within the text and a glossary of terms is offered at the end of the thesis, meaning might be lost. "To study Indigenous knowledge and then record it exclusively in English often can rupture the authentic fullness of aesthetics found in orality and performance of the culture" (Berryman et al., 2013).

3.2.3 Grounded Theory Inquiry

Corbin & Strauss (2008) offered a description of the methodological implications for grounded theory, depicting an approach that lends itself well suited to the topic of educational disengagement. "The world is very complex. There are no simple explanations for things. Rather, events are the result of multiple factors coming together and interacting in complex and often unanticipated ways." (para. 18). Charmaz (1996) contended that in line with interpretive tradition grounded theory seeks to "capture the worlds of people by describing their situations, thoughts, feelings and actions by relying on portraying the research participants' lives and voices" (p. 30). This methodology supports my strongly held position and belief that the participants in this research offer experience and expertise uniquely qualifying them to shed light on the issue of learner disengagement.

Charmaz (2011) identified grounded theory as encompassing effective strategies for qualitative researchers exploring issues of social justice. Grounded theory is a systematic methodology involving the construction of theory through data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Glasser & Strauss, 2017; Macfarlane, 2012). Using this approach, I sought to conceptualise the lived experiences of alternative education leaders, exemplary alternative education teachers, and former alternative education students, as experts in the field of educational disengagement within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Unlike other research methods that begin with an existing theoretical framework or perspective, grounded theory is a method of qualitative research that builds theory from the inductive analysis of data (Denzin, 2010; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). In this research project theory was derived from the data collated from semi-structured interviews and instead of testing the data against a predetermined theoretical framework, theory was generated, and then grounded in the data.

As an emerging researcher I have extended my understanding of grounded theory methodology whilst writing this thesis. During the process I have discovered a variety of approaches to grounded theory inquiry ranging from the more prescriptive style of Corbin and Strauss (2008) to Glasser's "get on with doing it" approach concerned with theoretical sensitivity and constant comparison (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Charmaz's (1996) constructivist approach best suits the methodological underpinnings of this research project with the researcher as the co-constructor of meaning using a combination of open coding and constant comparison coding.

3.3 Method

3.3.1 Research Context

In its formative years in the late 1990s and early 2000s, alternative education in Christchurch evolved into five main AE programmes spread across the city. The majority of secondary schools in the Christchurch area had pooled their AE funding into three consortium groups including East, South and North-West. A secondary school from within each of the three consortium groups volunteered to be the managing school of their respective consortium; a senior leader from each of the managing schools oversaw provider relationships, contracts, placements, and funding for the consortium group they managed. Each of the five AE programmes had established strong relationships with either their consortium managing school or a large secondary school within their consortium group. These informal relationships had evolved due to geographic commonalities or requirements, often these schools had been instrumental in establishing the AE programme in their area. For example, the AE programme where I worked had been driven by an experienced school guidance counsellor from a large secondary school in Christchurch. In practical terms this relationship allowed me, as a provisionally registered teacher, to be associated with the high school in my early career with an advice and guidance programme facilitated by this experienced teacher. He came to visit our programme regularly, observed my practice, and ensured I was able to attend any professional learning and development at the high school. I was one of the last AE teachers to gain my full teacher registration from any of these five original AE programmes.

Teacher registration went on to become a major issue in alternative education across Aotearoa New Zealand. In the mid 2000s the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) decided that teaching in alternative education did not qualify as teacher service towards full registration status. In 2016 a teacher-trained alternative education tutor spoke to a local journalist (Murphy, 2016) about her own issues with teacher registration as a teacher trained AE tutor based in Christchurch. Having taught in AE for five years this qualified teacher was required to complete refresher training at significant personal cost, both financial and time. Senior lecturer Judy Bruce from the University of Canterbury was interviewed for the article and described the NZTC decision as being “unreasonable” considering these teachers work with New Zealand’s “most challenging students” (Murphy, 2016). Bruce pointed out that “the teachers are required to have a knowledge across the entire curriculum, from new entrant levels, up to and including NCEA.” Christchurch alternative education manager Arthur Sutherland was also interviewed for the article (Murphy, 2016). Sutherland indicated that he had been advocating for the teacher-trained AE tutors with the NZTC, although a solution had yet to be reached, he intended to continue his attempts to negotiate change for the Christchurch based AE teachers.

In 2006 the three separate Christchurch AE consortia amalgamated into one managing school

with one alternative education manager. In 2019 Christchurch AE continues to be managed by one lead school. Within the Christchurch consortium there are five AE programme providers spread across the city, there are also a number of tertiary providers engaged in the consortium for AE students transitioning out of AE.

3.3.2 Participants

This research draws on one of the key principles of action research which sees practitioners as the experts in their field and in their unique professional contexts (Klehr, 2012). As is common in qualitative research, participants in this study will represent a purposive sampling approach, specifically a critical sample described by Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) as “one that is considered or judged to be particularly enlightening because it is so unusual or exceptional” (p. 431) such as a group of participants representing exemplary teachers in a specialist field. This study seeks to capture the expert knowledge and insight of a total of six participants including two experienced leaders in the specialist field of alternative education, two highly effective alternative education teachers, and two former alternative education students. As authorities in the area of secondary student educational disengagement these six participants will be the primary source of data collected and analysed in this study.

Rickinson (2006) recommended giving careful thought to participant selection attempting to cover a cross section of participants that is practicable and reasonable for both the participants and the researcher. In the selection of participants for this study accessibility has been prioritised over the benefits of geographic spread. Therefore, participants for this research will, in the first instance, be sought from the greater Christchurch area. However, if participants from the intended critical sample criteria (outlined below) could not be sourced from within this set area then participants were to be recruited from one of the other major cities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Christchurch is the largest city in Aotearoa New Zealand’s South Island, with participants all being sought from this area research relationships based on *whānaungatanga* (close connections between people) were able to be fostered and strengthened in line with *Kaupapa Māori* practices (Bishop, 1999).

The AE leader participants are both well regarded professionals and have had many years of experience leading in the field of alternative education. These leaders have recruited and worked alongside a significant number of AE teachers and tutors during their careers. The AE leaders were selected for their insight into exemplary teaching practice in the field of AE, but they were also essential in identifying the exemplary AE teacher participants.

Exemplary teachers in the specialist field of alternative education were identified by the experienced AE leaders using their own criteria and expert knowledge to judge exemplary practice. This criteria included teachers' ability to build an effective rapport with youth at-risk and successfully

support these learners to achieve their individual goals. The capped number of participants was set for feasibility reasons. AE has a high turnover of qualified teachers due to a number of reasons including, but not restricted to, a lack of pay parity for qualified teachers and difficulties renewing practicing certificates. Generally, there are less than 10 teacher trained AE tutors practising in the Canterbury area at any given time, therefore, AE teacher participants were not restricted to teachers currently working in alternative education. By including former AE teachers, the pool of possible participants was widened significantly.

The AE leaders and exemplary educators helped to identify two former AE student research participants. These former students are now adults and are regarded by the AE leaders and/or teachers as having engaged successfully in alternative education and have gone on to experience success in their adult life. Having attended alternative education all former students had disengaged from mainstream schooling as young people. AE leaders or AE teachers used their own criteria to judge former students as having successfully engaged in AE, this usually involved attendance and engagement in AE programmes and activities. AE leaders or AE teachers also used their own criteria to judge former students as having experienced success in their adult life, potential former student participants identified included a number of qualified professionals (particularly in the field of education and social or youth work), a small business owner, and devoted parents.

Grounded theory, as a method of inquiry, requires the researcher to engage in a process of cyclic and simultaneous data collation and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Glasser & Strauss, 2017). The grounded theory researcher does not begin the research with an existing theory to test, instead the researcher uncovers new understandings and theory generated from the research data (Denscombe, 1998; Glasser & Strauss, 2017). Denscombe (1998) alerted the qualitative researcher of the possible need to “go back to the field with these explanations and themes to check their validity against ‘reality’” (p. 212). With participants in relatively close proximity I was able to engage *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* as required. In the initial contact with participants the possibility that I may need to re-engage with participants in order to test the limitations or refine a developing category (Denscombe, 1998) was outlined both in the information letters and consent forms.

It is important to note that in the field of AE educators with and without formal teaching qualifications are all referred to as tutors (Brooking et al., 2009; Clark et al., 2010; ERO, 2011, 2012c; Schoone, 2017). Most AE programmes are facilitated by a team of tutors with a variety of professional and personal experience and expertise, although many AE programmes employ at least one teacher-trained tutor there is no national requirement to do so. For many years the alternative education community requested support from the Ministry of Education in the form of increased funding to attract trained teachers into AE, on top of the issue of pay equity for qualified teachers many teacher-trained

AE tutors were not able to attain or maintain their teacher registration whilst teaching in alternative education. Despite there being no Ministry of Education requirement to employ teacher-trained AE tutors the MOE requires that AE programmes deliver the New Zealand Curriculum as part of their key performance indicators (MOE, n.d-b). At a local level in the Christchurch, context there is an expectation and contractual requirement, that at least one AE tutor per AE programme be a qualified teacher. This has been the case since before I entered alternative education in 2001. In 2011 the MOE introduced a funding model incorporating pedagogical leadership in alternative education (ERO, 2012c). Here managing schools, within AE clusters or consortia, are required to dedicate five percent of their funding to employing a registered teacher within the role of pedagogical leader (ERO, 2012c; MOE, n.d-b). These pedagogical leaders offer their teaching expertise, advice and guidance to AE tutors, with a focus on teacher-trained tutors, across their wider AE consortium or cluster.

3.3.3 Ethical Considerations

There are times when the disconnect between tertiary education institution conventions and indigenous epistemologies seems like a gaping chasm. The process of gaining ethical approval for this research proved to be a challenging time and source of tension. Macfarlane, Duckworth and Macfarlane (in press) argue “that university ethics review bodies must understand the diversity of epistemologies in order to recognise the need for differences in ethical principles and practice. The academy and its professional practices, including ethics review processes, must build understanding of a knowledge framework which correctly locates Indigenous knowledge, and which empowers emerging and established researchers to appropriately traverse Aotearoa New Zealand’s cultural terrain” (p. 13).

Participants’ rights of involvement were outlined in information letters (Appendices A, B, and C) and consent forms (Appendix E) highlighting the voluntary nature of the research and each participants right to withdraw from the study at any point. Berryman et al. (2013) see the need for participants to be able to “move away from the research relationship at any time without penalty” as paramount (p. 24). If a participant chose to withdraw from the study, all relevant data and information gathered would be extracted from the research document. However, participants were warned that once analysis of data had begun it would become increasingly difficult to separate and remove the influence of participant’s data from the wider findings. The information sheets (Appendices A, B, and C) for all participants described the nature and purpose of the study and included a timeline for the research project including the date for final withdrawal.

Consent forms were signed by each participant after they had read through the information sheet. For AE leaders or AE teachers currently employed by an alternative education provider, or similar, the centre was given an information sheet (Appendix D) about the research project and a consent form (Appendix F) requiring management and/or governance approval (depending on the

centres operational structure).

The alternative education community is philosophically relational in nature and whānaungatanga (close connections between people) underpins its interactions with learners, whānau, and stakeholders. To protect the anonymity and privacy of the research participants pseudonyms are used, and any details that could lead to the identification of participants were altered or omitted from publication. All data collected for the study has been kept in password protected electronic form until the completion of the research project and for five subsequent years, at which time it will be destroyed. A transcriber was used and was required to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix G). Although the utmost care was taken to protect the anonymity and privacy of all participants, participants were warned of the possibility for a reader to guess identities. I have given careful consideration to this risk when presenting the research data and subsequent findings, being mindful not to divulge too much detail when doing so risks exposing the identity of participants and/or interview subjects. Giving participants the opportunity to access and revise transcripts of interviews offered further opportunity to detect information that could breach anonymity in this research.

With the objective of capturing each participants' authentic voice an important part of the process included the sharing of interview transcripts giving each participant the opportunity to clarify, omit statements or add further detail to their verbal accounts. Upon completion of the research project a summary of findings was sent to any participant who had expressed an interest in receiving a copy.

With the likelihood that the AE leaders will be respected and esteemed members of the wider AE community, there was potential for AE teacher participants to feel obligated or compelled to participate in this research. Former AE students could also feel pressure to participate if nominated by an AE leader or teacher who they respected and admired having attended alternative education as young people. To help mitigate the risk of participants feeling undue pressure to participate in this study all AE leaders and AE teachers who recommended others were reminded that participation is voluntary. Those who recommended others to participate in this research were also informed that not all recommendations would result in the nominated persons being able to take part in this study, not only due to the voluntary nature of the research but also due to the capped number of participants set for feasibility reasons. Participants decisions not to participate or to withdraw from the research would not be disclosed to any other party.

Although the focus of the study is exemplary teaching practice, there was potential that participants delve into experiences during the semi structured interviews that could cause distress. Neither myself nor the participants themselves would be able to predict exactly what content would emerge in the semi-structured interviews. Therefore, a number of preventative measures and potential responses were considered and planned in advance (Kavanaugh & Ayres, 1998).

In practical terms there were a number of measures taken to minimise the risk of psychological harm or discomfort to participants, starting with the process of consent. Included on the information sheet and consent forms were details around the rights of the participant to decline to answer questions and to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. Questions and/or likely topics of discussion during semi structured interviews were included on the information sheets and were designed with a focus on positive experiences of exemplary teaching practice, avoiding direct questions that delved into potentially upsetting experiences. I was prepared to offer rest breaks, moving the interview onto more neutral topics, postpone some sections or all of the interview if necessary. In the event that involvement in the research appeared to have adversely affected a participant, a number of responses would have been considered such as checking on the participant during the interview, checking that the participant had access to a support person directly after the interview, and supplying the participant with a directory of helplines and local mental health service contact details. Thankfully none of these concerns eventuated.

3.3.4 Semi-structured Interview

“A crucial principle in planning research is that the research methods are driven by the research topic/question (not the other way around).” (Rickinson, 2006, p. 36). In seeking to identify the understandings, beliefs, and practices of exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand’s most at-risk students, interviewing these teachers, their colleagues and former students presents itself as the method with the best “fit for purpose” (Rickinson, 2006, p. 36). Interviews are an effective way of capturing authentic voice in participants own vernacular, a skilled interviewer can elicit unexpected information and deeper perception of experience from interviewees. However, Rickinson (2006) warned that the interview method can be time expensive and is reliant on the skill set of the interviewer. As an inexperienced interviewer it was imperative that I was thoroughly prepared for interviews and actively sought advice and guidance from my research supervisors before, and during, the on-going interview process. Charmaz (1996) recommended the grounded theorists prepares a tentative interview guide with a mind to adapting and reworking the plan as areas that need more attention arise and areas that are prove not to be “fruitful” are deleted (p. 34).

Regarding learning from the historic pitfalls of traditional research approaches for indigenous peoples, Bishop (1999) discussed the use of a kaupapa Māori lens to ensure the participants are empowered in a holistic approach to research. Within a culturally responsive approach to data collection Bishop (1999) advocates for semi-structured or unstructured interviews in a way that promotes a greater reciprocity between the interviewer and interviewee. Using this approach to data collection, the interviewee is able to influence the direction and pace of the interview and better express their opinions, intended meaning and the importance they assign to their message. Bishop (1999) discussed the potential use of interview as a tool for addressing researcher imposition and offers an alternative view

of interview as in-depth conversations. In this way, the research relationship between the researcher and research participants is based on reciprocity, co-construction, and co-ownership of the research process and products.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

During the writing of the literature review for this thesis I discovered Sergiovanni's (2007) model based on the head, heart and hand describing the various qualities of school leaders. This structure proved an effective frame on which to present what the literature tells us about exemplary teaching practice, capturing the three key elements of both research questions. During data analysis I again found this framework to be useful in beginning to group emergent codes and categories derived from the data. In the context of this current study the head, heart and hand framework serves as a helpful tool to present theories generated by the research within each of the three areas. This understanding and assertion is significant in seeking to ensure that I did not engage in "selective coding" too early in the data analysis process (Glaser, 1978, cited in Belgrave & Seide, 2019, p. 172).

Charmaz (1996) warned of the risks in completing a "careful and exhaustive literature review" (pp. 47), as is common in "traditional research design", before data analysis so as to avoid influencing the researcher whilst they seek to identify emergent codes, categories and theory. As an emerging grounded theory researcher, I discovered this suggestion well after I had completed a relatively comprehensive literature review. I mitigated the potential influence of the literature review findings by being mindful of the risk and revisiting my literature review once the initial categories had emerged through the data analysis process.

In grounded theory, data collection and data analysis do not occur in a neat and sequential order. Data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously (Glasser & Strauss, 2017) calling on me, as the researcher, to be cognisant of possible theoretical meanings of data even during the interview process itself. I was sensitive to repeated ideas and common themes from the first interview and, as a novice research interviewer, I found it useful to begin noting these first impressions from this early stage of data analysis. This enabled me to enter each subsequent interview tuned in to new concepts and to explore already emerging codes and ideas more thoroughly, if or when they arose.

A grounded theory approach to data analysis sits within an iterative process where data is in a constant cycle of collation and analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 2017). Analytic techniques and concepts within grounded theory require the researcher to become immersed in the data using constant comparison, theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation (Glasser & Strauss, 2017). Rickinson (2006) warned that it is not simple to analyse and derive concepts from interview transcripts. Throughout the data collection and analysis process I was required to be constantly filtering,

rearranging, and exploring repeated ideas and common concepts (Denscombe, 1998; Glasser & Strauss, 2017). As these emerging ideas and concepts became apparent, they needed to be extracted and tied with codes (Glasser & Strauss, 2017). The codes were eventually grouped into categories, with the ultimate goal being that these categories be the basis for new theory (Denscombe, 1998; Glasser & Strauss, 2017). Throughout the process I was mindful of focusing on the research questions and bringing the data back to the understandings, beliefs and practices (head, heart and hand) of exemplary teachers of at-risk learners as per the research questions.

By the time all six interviews were completed, numerous codes had already been identified. The next stage of data analysis involved a more detailed analysis of the six interview transcripts which generated many more codes. At this stage I again enlisted the head, heart and hand framework for each code considering which part of the research question is this data answering: did it pertain to knowledge, beliefs or actions. Once grouped into these three subsections recurrent themes and ideas became more apparent. When grouping the emergent codes and categories into each of the three focus areas I found that some of the categories could be applied within more than one domain. In this situation it sometimes helped to return to the original codes and investigate the value of splitting and generating a category for each of the overarching areas. If the category kept its integrity in one area, despite being applicable to more than one, I made the decision to keep it in the area where it seemed to have the best fit. In discussing a number of well-known metaphors and figures developed to represent holistic approaches within the wider area of human development, Macfarlane (2007, p. 164) pointed out that “a reductionist approach to explaining the variables would fail to recognise the coherence among the constellations of features that make up the whole.”

Once all key codes and categories had been divided into the three key domains of head, heart and hand I was able to start developing more concrete themes. Within each of the three areas I generated six key findings presented under subheadings generated by the combined ideas, and in many cases, actual words of the research participants.

3.4 Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology and consequent research design employed to capture the expert knowledge of two AE leaders, two exemplary AE teachers, and two former AE students, with all six participants considered experts in the area of educationally disengaged young people in the Aotearoa New Zealand context. The research context and alternative education in the Christchurch area were described in detail and the process for recruiting and engaging with research participants was explained. Following this the ethical considerations were presented. The chapter concluded with details around the data collation and analysis processes, explaining how these occur simultaneously within a grounded theory inquiry approach.

Chapter Four: Data Stories

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the lived experiences, ideas and perspectives shared by the six research participants during their semi-structured interviews. The six separate, data stories are presented as standalone within the three participant subcategories, including two experienced leaders in the specialist field of alternative education, two highly effective alternative education teachers, and two former alternative education students. Pseudonyms are used to protect participant privacy and anonymity; the names given are Māori words that reflect key characteristics and mannerisms of each participants evident during their interview, the intended meaning behind each pseudonym is presented at the beginning of each of the six data stories.

Each of the data stories begins with a sub-heading dedicated to the participants journey into alternative education. All of the data stories present findings within the overarching subheadings subsumed in the head, heart and hand framework, as explained in chapter 3. However, other sub-headings were generated by the interview itself, for example, the AE leaders both have sections of their data story dedicated to AE teacher recruitment and retainment. Teacher wellbeing and resiliency was a major theme in the interviews with the AE leaders and teachers. Noddings (2010) outlined the importance of caring for the carer, in the context of this research the carer being the teacher and the AE students being the cared for. Caring for the carer is one of the sub-headings in this chapter because it featured so heavily in the interviews with the AE leaders and teachers, as did the sub-heading ‘operating within a team’. Neither of the former AE students have sub-headings dedicated to teacher recruitment, teacher resilience, or working within a team.

4.2 Data Stories: Alternative Education Leaders

The AE leaders interviewed for this research have each had more 20 years or more experience working with youth-at-risk. During each interview it quickly became apparent that both experienced leaders were also exemplary educators in their own right. Therefore, the interviews sometimes veered away from what I had anticipated would be a birds-eye-view of exemplary AE teacher practice and delved into their own understandings, beliefs and practices as exemplary AE educators.

4.2.1 Matatau’s Data Story

Matatau - learned, experienced, well-informed, knowledgeable, competent, fluent, skilled.

Matatau's journey into alternative education

Matatau is a male of Māori descent in his 40s who has over 20 years of experience working in the area of youth development. In the mid 1990s Matatau had finished his bachelor's degree and was been playing sport abroad. Matatau was planning on returning to New Zealand to complete a postgraduate qualification. News of his return resulted in Matatau being offered a part time job in a newly established alternative education programme.

“My first engagement was actually hard case [New Zealand slang, amusing]. I was back home, I was driving down [local street] when I saw a police car pulling up a whole lot of kids outside a house and I went “oh I know a couple of those kids, I recognise them. They’d better not be the ones that are at [AE programme].” Sure enough, next day at school I turned up and they were there, that was the guys.”

At the programme Matatau worked as a youth worker alongside two teacher trained AE tutors. He added:

“My job was to try and remove as much of the filters and distractions that were a barrier to them [the students] actually participating in building healthy relationships, being able to come to school, being able to actually engage.”

Although Matatau had intended to work at the programme for six months, he ended up staying in that role for six years. His experience in AE led him to rethink the postgraduate qualification he had originally planned to complete, Matatau enrolled at teacher's college and gained a postgraduate diploma in teaching. After graduating, Matatau taught overseas in a school delivering specialist education for children with autism. Matatau returned to New Zealand and became the manager of the wider organisation running the AE programme, he described his current role:

“includes hands on stuff, still doing the camps, still helping out ... shaping of the philosophical aspect of the programmes: What do we want to achieve? What works? What doesn't work? It's slightly more the birds eye view ... [the role is] still hands on.”

Caring for the carer in alternative education

Matatau supported his staff by being present, “so a key part of my role now is listening”. Matatau led with a philosophy that he described as “one of those clichés: it takes a village to raise a

child” and this manifested in a number of ways, even the physical layout of the site when he described it:

“My office was right next to the classroom because that means that I’m able to sit in that space and see and sense what’s going on for our tutors, for our kids ... so you can actually get on top of stuff really quickly, also to acknowledge and support a couple of admin staff also sit in that space and normally you put your admin staff as far away as possible so, it helps us to walk in their [the AE tutors] shoes. ... collectively, as a whole organisation, we’re walking with our kids.”

Matatau believed that professionals working with young people need to be able to “walk the talk”, “if you’re not walking it then you don’t have the right to talk it, I want to see how you are walking it.” This requires teachers to be able to role model the values and actions they encourage and require of the young people. To support his staff’s wellbeing Matatau advocates for staff to engage in “personal development, not just professional development.” One way he encouraged this is by asking “critical reflection questions”. He continued

”Too often we don’t give our staff the time and space to step outside and reflect and debrief.... They don’t get their breathing space and that’s really unhealthy, it’s unhealthy for them individually as people, it’s unhealthy for their practice and that ultimately means it’s unhealthy for the kids.... Developing a really robust practice of critical reflection and critical thinking.... Creating lots of spaces like that on a micro basis, daily ... weekly ... and then termly and half yearly.”

In alternative education stressful situations and serious incidents can occur frequently. One of the many benefits of Matatau’s AE programme being part of a wider organisation is that Matatau and other skilled youth workers were on hand to offer support to the AE tutors and students. “We need to practice healthy behaviours ourselves” for Matatau this means that staff in the organisation, including himself, take had better care of each other and are willing and able to step in “picking up some of the slack when the guys are stressed.”

Operating as Part of a Team

Matatau placed great importance on the adults in his organisation working together to support young people’s development:

“You’re a spring in the trampoline adding bounce but you’re not the only spring and if you’re trying to be all things to that young person then that’s not healthy for them and it’s not healthy for you.... I’ve never seen one teacher who’s absolutely got it all.... it’s the team having the right approach and balance.”

When Matatau talked about finding “balance” in the AE team of tutors he is thinking beyond the individual, formal roles and technical skills of each member:

“We tend to assign responsibilities or titles ... so you have a teacher, a youth worker, social worker, but actually what you need is the collective.... If you use that model of whānau ... the modern nuclear western whānau is the parents are responsible for everything but with Māori whānau ... you’d go to an uncle or aunty to talk about sort of key things like puberty, going through adolescence ... because there was always a little bit of distance, but not in terms of relationship, but just a different type of relationship.... It’s a little bit like that in AE you’re trying to create whānau so what are the dynamics of whānau that work? You need a mum, you need your dad, you need your disciplinarian, you need people who can take on all those roles at different times when as required but recognising you’ll add a different flavour to that.”

Recruiting and Retaining AE Teachers

Matatau had a unique approach to recruiting teachers into alternative education. Again, this approach steers away from assigned roles and technical skills and gave greater weight to what the team needs to best meet the needs of the students:

“We had a longstanding youth worker ... [who was] moving into other things ... we got them [the AE team] to break down what she did, and it was really crucial. It’s interesting what the guys came up with ... she’s the one who remembers the birthdays of the kids and of staff and so when she’s not there we know there’s something missing and it’s those subtle [things] ... like spider’s webs those connecting points they’re just as important as somebody who can write a really good report because that’s what creates a strong team culture and a sense of being valued.... So, we’ll look at all those factors and things, what do

our kids need and then what is missing across our skillset and how do we then recruit and bring that in.”

During the interview, the idea that exemplary AE teachers need to come from similar backgrounds or ethnicities as the AE students was discussed. Matatau felt that these attributes had benefits but were not essential features of exemplary AE teachers. He put his feelings into words as below

“I think, in the balance of a team, you probably need people who understand [the world these young people come from] but some of our most effective staff ... have come from a completely different world but they come from that place of love.... I think what’s important is that understanding of whoever comes in they have to find that point of connection.... Someone who understands te ao Māori (the Māori world), urban Māori, I think that can add a whole lot of value in this place. The same with Pasifika ... that brings different perspectives which are really important ... our kids know what it’s like to be a minority and they know what it’s like to sit on the outside ... but I wouldn’t say that only Māori should teach Māori in this place.”

Exemplary Alternative Education Teachers

Prior to beginning his teacher training Matatau had been advised to seek out a particular lecturer at the college who was renowned for his expertise in behaviour management and student engagement. It was good advice and Matatau was challenged and learned a great deal from him, “he says don’t worry about the delivery if you don’t create the right classroom culture and dynamics then you’re never going to be able to teach ... so again, fantastic parallels to AE.” This lecturer also taught Matatau about the “classic blank face” which Matatau was able to observe in action when he worked alongside one of the AE teachers that Matatau considered to be exemplary, Hemi. He described Hemi:

“Hemi had this classic blank face. He was just so even.... He never raised his voice, but he knew how to claim a space in a room. He did it naturally, it wasn’t always intentional ... the difference between the way of doing something in a punitive way, about claiming power, as opposed to the way that just comes from having mana (status, prestige, influence).”

Matatau identified another teacher, Tui, that he considered to be an exemplary practitioner. He

described her characteristics and knowledge, “she had heart, she had humour, she had all those things and she understood youth development through and through.” A particular skill set that Matataau highlighted was Tui’s ability to design and develop teaching and learning resources; “[Tui was] a fantastic administrator and knew how to design highly engaging interactive learning modules. So, she knew how to bring learning to life.”

In reference to another exemplary AE teacher he had worked alongside, Matataau highlighted the heavy workload of a teacher-trained AE tutor who was also tasked with managing the AE programme. Matataau describes her multifaceted role, “where you’re having to lead a programme, sort out the funding, manage all of the other bits and pieces and yet still get results. The demands are way beyond any normal teaching requirement.”

The Head: What Exemplary AE Teachers Know

Matataau talked about exemplary teachers as learners with a strong understanding that they have a great deal to learn about and from the students. In this regard he said:

“I think that’s the great thing and if that concept of ākona which is a mutual concept, so it’s teacher - learner, it’s reciprocal.... I might be taking on the role of supporting in a formal teaching sense but out of that I need to be learning what works. So that’s that ongoing relationship and too often that gets left behind. It’s not necessarily always about delivery of subject, it’s about you as a person. Your ability to chuck aside your ego and ... focus on those key developmental needs for the kids to get into the next stage of the journey.”

In recognising that young people are valued partners in the learning process Matataau recommended “acknowledging that many of these guys [AE students] are experts in their own area ... they have a whole lot of knowledge and wisdom that I don’t have around certain things.” In this way, Matataau identified inquiry learning as an ideal approach for engaging AE students in learning:

“I think one of the most important things I learned as a teacher, and important through youth developed practices, is that “oh I don’t know that, let’s find it out, or let’s work this out, that’s a good question, I can’t answer that, let’s work it out ... I don’t know how to solve this, well what do you think? Well what do we know?” So that inquiry-based learning.”

Matatau described his time teaching overseas at a school for Autistic children as a formative learning experience in his teaching career and he said: “what I learned at that place is what worked well for these kids actually would work well in mainstream and not the other way around.” Matatau started to make connections between his students at this special school and the AE learners he had worked with in New Zealand. He described the situation:

“Really interesting with autistics kids is the statistics in terms of criminal offending and ongoing recidivism, mental health issues, way higher than the general population. In some ways they matched a lot of our AE kids ... the core basis of that programme was what we did in AE.... At the heart of what we’re doing ... was what kids need in order to succeed ... if we were able to take learning from alternative education and apply it in mainstream, we wouldn’t need alternative education.”

Matatau often talked about the mana of both the teacher and the student. In this regard he added: “Mana being that sense of destiny, of purpose that spark that comes from acknowledging you have a place or purpose or calling in life and the awakening of that spark.” Matatau had an underlying belief that “you need to know yourself in order to know others” and he talked about mana in relation to the authenticity of AE teachers, while also alluding to the perceptiveness of the students:

“Actually the mana that they [the tutors] hold by choosing to step into the space, to work on our most, some of our hardest more vulnerable kids and the commitment ... it’s just not a profession, you can’t go home and be a completely different person at home to what you are in the classroom because the kids see it straightaway. They see that.”

More than technical knowledge, Matatau placed great importance on teachers knowledge about young people’s lives outside the classroom. He described this knowledge as being “absolutely crucial in terms of actually building trust.” He continued:

“One of my biggest frustrations ... we don’t look at them [young people] with a wholeness, an understanding young people are also a product of the environment they come from and understand the environment has a massive impact on decision making, impulse reaction understand the environment the young person’s coming out of and to do that you have to build a relationship with whānau, you

have to build a relationship with peers, you have to know their community.”

Matatau warned that delving into the inner workings and home lives of students beyond the classroom can have an element of risk for teachers:

“Too often we don't have the time, we're constrained by a whole lot facets and things that don't allow us actually to scratch deep enough to actually understand ... the cause, what's driving that, and to have the conversation in order to understand ... “hey, what's happening? Are you okay? What's going on?” ... and be prepared that you might be the person that gets the bullets or the arrows coming at you because often you know a natural thing - fight or flight it's not about you, it's actually allowing them time and space.”

The Heart: What Exemplary AE Teachers Believe

Matatau believed that exemplary AE teachers do not personalise student behaviour. This ability is underpinned by an understanding that “hurt people, hurt people.” These teachers do not focus on the behaviour itself but instead think about what sits below the face value of behaviour, “the root cause.” These teachers are able to show empathy for the young person, even in the face of serious misconduct. He continued:

“The most successful teachers have been ones who have been able to depersonalise and say “it's not about me, let's actually look at what's going on, actually you've had a really shitty day, actually if I had to put up with what you've come through I'd probably behave in a far worse way.”

Several times throughout the interview Matatau talked about exemplary teachers' ability to “chuck aside their ego,” at one point he suggested that AE educators need to pay attention “the ecosystem versus the ego-system.” Matatau explained why exemplary AE teachers need to leave their ego at the door and “the ones who wanted to be there to save the world got weeded out”. He added:

“To liken it to an analogy ... using the theme of [Polynesian] navigating. When you're navigating using Pacific voyages it's only in that last 2% of the journey that actually you see the destination. So, if you're coming in to change the world ... you're not going to see [the final destination], you're going to get discouraged, people are going

to let you down, you're going to get hurt by the kids. It's actually the moment you make it about *you* [emphasis added] then you're not serving the young people. It's not saying you don't have to look after yourself, take care of yourself, but if you're not growing as a person to support them to grow, you become static as a teacher or as a person then they're going to become static."

Matatau described the attributes of the type of professionals he saw doing great work with youth-at-risk, and he also explained why it is so important that AE teachers challenge AE students' ideas of what an adult is:

"You had to be a good person, you had to be grounded, you had to be solid to work in this space, and you have to have integrity and those are the things I think which kids value most because if you did that survey and map of their lives they're continually being let down by the system. And the adults who sit in front of that system are the face of that. They've [the young people] been told to be adult, they've been told not to trust, they've been taught all these things ... so you get people [who are] the antithesis of that then that's naturally going to change how they shape and see the world."

Matatau recommended that challenging the young people's worldviews by role modelling a different way of being. However, he suggests a more direct approach when challenging the system and advocating for young people. For example, in a multi-disciplinary meeting:

"Every other system you're dealing with is about getting people to serve the system, but you've got to try and bring all those systems and approaches to serve the young person.... You might be the only person who's sitting in that room saying, "actually what is in the best interests and developmental needs of this young person" and you know what that's like, eh? Where everyone else is trying to tick their box in the system."

In situations such as this Matatau talked about the importance of advocating for the young person without diminishing the mana of the other professional, recognising that everyone has their own priorities and pressures, "there's a real skill involved in that, some people do that I wish I had more of and learned a lot earlier."

Along with the belief that students are capable and competent partners in their own learning journey Matatau also discussed the importance of teachers believing that their students have mana. When describing the attributes that made Hemi an exemplary teacher Matatau talked about the way that Hemi interacted with his students, "... he gave mana to these boys, so they acknowledged his mana." Matatau added:

"Rangatira is leadership, is the ability to weave and bring out the best in others ... that's what our AE teachers do, the good ones do. And part of that process is acknowledging their own mana, finding their own place to stand so they support the young people and those around have their mana enhanced."

When talking about Tui, an exemplary teacher and Matatau's associate teacher during his teacher training, Matatau recalled an experience he had where the student's competence and insight was valued and acknowledged in an authentic context:

"She'd say don't ask me for feedback, ask the kids for feedback. ... so, got it videoed and they gave me feedback and they pointed out all these thing that I was doing, but again I really admired these girls, the teen mums mainly 16 and 17 they were able to, with real humour, point out the reason where I was a really crap teacher."

Exemplary teachers' belief in their student's competency and capability goes much further than just their ability to be active partners in the learning process. Matatau talked about the other strengths and abilities that AE student have, for example "their bullshit radar detector is amazing."

"I think within that too, acknowledging the amount of resiliency that exists is shown in AE is critical as well.... Not a lot of our young people have the words to express, but they're actually well-grounded ... they're so much more resilient, stronger than a lot of kids in mainstream.... Their EQ (emotional intelligence) at many levels is incredibly high ... they can read people, they can read situations, they can read environments ... they're scanning all the time because often, you know, their senses are always on that high [alert]."

Throughout his interview Matatau referenced several exemplary teachers but summarised his beliefs about exemplary AE teachers in the following statement:

“All these guys had different aspects but the key thing that I think that they actually really enjoyed kids. They enjoyed young people and they were sympathetic and empathetic, but they were never pushovers. None were soft. I always think empathy is confused with fluffiness, that’s never the case they had a real enjoyment, a sense of humour it’s just that they were good people.”

The Hand: What Exemplary AE Teachers Do

In his working alongside Hemi, Matatau came to the conclusion that “a lot of our kids in alternative education weren’t the classic extroverts, they’re introverted but forced to live in an extroverted world.” With this in mind, Matatau saw that Hemi did one very important thing for his students. He described Hemi as below:

“And he allowed them to find that space where it’s actually okay to read a book ... [with a focus on] that pack mentality, follow the herd. But actually, to discover it’s okay to go off and do some things off on your own and to claim that space. These kids live such chaotic lives, he didn’t realise the impact it would be from a therapeutic point of view, to have silence and just enjoy that silence.”

Exemplary teachers’ pay attention to the classroom environment and culture. Matatau explained why a well-managed learning space is particularly important for AE students:

“They [the AE students] bring the stress, they bring anxiety ... [the young people need] places of refuge and safety so that they can detox, destress and get to that point of learning we’ve got to create that culture and climate.”

However, Matatau is a firm believer in the power of authentic, teachable moments within learning opportunities outside traditional curriculum areas such as numeracy and literacy. Giving examples of how young people can be supported to process grief and to manage conflict, Matatau thinks that the AE environment serves as the perfect place for such opportunities:

“You don’t want to have a space that’s completely all happy in a false sense. You need [a space] where people are real, but you manage it in a healthy way. “Hey, it’s okay to disagree, this is how we work out and how we find a compromise because this is what life’s like.”... We

don't want ... a homogenous teaching environment; we need that one that captures that core essence of what creates a healthy whānau.”

Throughout the interview, Matatau regularly used words such as “fun”, “joy” and “happy”. These were used in reference to engaging teaching resources, outdoor activities with the students. He also talked about an exemplary AE teacher whose defining characteristic was his extreme enthusiasm and sense of fun:

“well whatever I’m going to be more hard out than you” and so that won the kids hearts. well I’ll jump in a puddle first, I’ll do this first, I’ll be the guy who does that, I’m going to take a fall, I’m not afraid to make a dick of myself.”

Matatau was steadfast in his belief that “one of the critical factors I think for any successful teacher or person is their ability to laugh at themselves. If you don't have that then you’re in the wrong job.” He also pointed out that staff should be empowered to “chuck this [scheduled activities] out the window” and make a decision such as “we just need to go to the beach today.” He also added:

“A lot of our kids’ lives are devoid of joy and sometimes they’ve got shitty lives and you can’t fix or change that, but you can give them opportunities to experience joy and life and that spark which comes with being happy.”

4.2.2 Aroha’s Data Story

Aroha - loving, caring, compassionate, sympathetic.

Aroha’s Journey into Alternative Education

Aroha is a female of Māori descent in her 40s who has 20 years’ experience working in the area of alternative education. Aroha grew up in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand strongly connected to her marae (formal meeting place). Aroha came to visit a friend in Christchurch having just completed some training at a polytechnic. During her visit Aroha was offered some casual administrative work in an organisation in the health and wellbeing industry. This soon turned into a permanent position and Aroha made the decision to move to Christchurch permanently.

After several years in her role Aroha was offered a new employment opportunity as administrative support and teacher-aide in an alternative education programme. Aroha found that she enjoyed the work and stayed in that role for around 10 years. During that time Aroha worked under a

number of different programme managers, often the manager was also the teacher trained staff member on the programme. Aroha noted that the role of teaching alongside the responsibility of managing the programme was a significant workload and Aroha began to take on more and more of the administrative tasks. When yet another programme manager left the organisation, Aroha covered the manager position until the programme governance board offered her the permanent role. Aroha accepted the position of programme manager and has been in the role for a further 10 years.

Caring for the Carer in Alternative Education

Aroha saw one of her key leadership roles as being a support for the tutors. Aroha continued to work alongside the young people in a learning support role, she takes care of most of the administrative tasks including securing extra funding to keep the programme sustainable. Prior to beginning the interview, I discovered that the students had enjoyed a shared breakfast and Aroha had been washing the breakfast dishes. She stated:

“Being brought up around the marae it’s sort of like you learn how to manaaki, you learn how to look after people so that’s what we do here, so anything that needs to be done I just do it.... As long as the kids are being taught ... the other staff that are doing the mahi ... teaching them or working alongside them then I’ll go and do all the general dogsbody, I’ll be everything, I’ll be the gardener ... emptying out rubbish bins, doing the toilets, I’ll do whatever else it takes.”

Aroha’s programme is backed by a very supportive governance board, made up of experienced professionals who have worked with young people and have an understanding of the world the AE programme operates in. When asked how Aroha looked after her own wellbeing, over her many years of service in AE, Aroha first referenced her friends, with one friend in particular being a major support to her. Aroha also referenced a hobby that she enjoys immensely during her time off. One of the biggest supports that Aroha talked about was the wider team working in the AE organisation:

“We normally talk to one another because it’s easier to explain to them how you’re feeling or what’s going on for you than someone else that doesn’t know about AE and the type of students that we do get coming through those doors.”

Operating as Part of a Team

Throughout the interview, Aroha regularly spoke about the importance of the AE tutor team (including herself as administrator, teacher aide, and manager), in the first instance this was in reference

to collegial support in strengthening personal wellbeing. Aroha spoke about one particular team of tutors she had worked in that had been particularly successful. Aroha described the group as being well balanced, strength-based and cohesive, “we all knew the kaupapa (ideology, topic, agenda) and the way we do things. So yeah the kids couldn’t play us off.” One of the male tutors had a strong background in Māori language and customs and was described as “strict” with a “don’t mess with me attitude”; another member of the team was a qualified teacher who “loved working with the kids but one thing that she hated was the admin”; a tutor of Pacific Island descent who was “really soft, easy going, really chilled”; and Aroha in her multifaceted role. She continued:

“It really was cruisy like during the time that they were here together. We’d got on together with the kids, we bonded as staff ... I think because we became more relaxed and chilled the students became more relaxed and chilled.”

Aroha also spoke about the therapeutic benefits of humour and having a laugh with her alternative education colleagues and teammates:

“Sometimes after work we will sit down and one of the tutors will act like one of the kids and we pick it up straight away ... we crack up laughing ... you might make a mistake and you’re able to laugh about it ... when you laugh about it then, hey, it’s no big deal.”

Recruiting and Retaining AE Teachers

Aroha noted that she had seen many tutors and managers (both teacher trained and not) come and go over the years she has served in alternative education. Aroha spoke about the difficulties the programme has encountered in terms of staff retention, specifically in reference to workload and stress levels. “You’re the social worker, the aunty or uncle, the doctor, the nurse ... you’re everything to some of these kids.” In Aroha’s opinion, another barrier specific to teacher retention is that alternative education is not funded in a way that easily allows AE providers to pay teacher qualified tutors what they would earn in a mainstream school.

Aroha: It’s got to come out of our budget, so we don’t get a separate budget for their wages.

Rachel: So, you can’t compete with the mainstream schools?

Aroha: Oh, definitely not, definitely not.

It is a contractual requirement for AE programmes in Christchurch to employ at least one

qualified teacher within the AE tutor team and Aroha sometimes finds recruiting teacher trained AE tutors to be difficult. Aroha advertises the role as an “AE tutor” with teaching experience or qualifications being advantageous. “The reason why we put ‘tutor’ is because we can’t pay their scale rate that they are entitled to. It makes it really hard.” During the recruitment process Aroha is not overly concerned with the experience level of the prospective teacher-trained tutor but is more interested in the passion the applicant shows for working with these particular young people.

Aroha expressed her intent to provide staff with nonmonetary benefits to working for this not-for-profit organisation. “So, I think for AE we just make things happen and make things work. We work with what’s happening with the tutors or with the staff here at [AE programme].” Aroha actively looked for opportunities where staff can meet their family responsibilities alongside their workplace duties, for example one staff member was able to have her baby visit the programme throughout the day so the baby could continue to be breastfed. Aroha would do her best to facilitate a tutor being able to attend special events at their own children’s schools and the team works within a high-trust model where staff can negotiate opportunities such as working from home when appropriate. Aroha believes that establishing this goodwill within the team of tutors breeds a culture where tutors are happy to cover for their colleagues when need be.

Aroha noted that sometimes it was important to let new tutors try new things and take risks, even if the planned activity or approach is likely to fall flat Aroha allows staff to learn what does and does not work for themselves.

Exemplary alternative education teachers

When asked to describe some of the exemplary teachers whom Aroha had encountered during her years in alternative education, she first spoke of a female teacher who had a young family. This teacher was exemplary in Aroha’s opinion because she was incredibly driven and passionate about the work. This teacher worked tirelessly to ensure that the programme worked in the brand-new venue they were establishing at the time.

Another exemplary teacher described by Aroha came from a different country and was unlike teachers she had worked with in AE. Aroha described her as below:

“He had a different teaching style with the kids. I think at first a lot of kids didn’t know how to take him, slowly but surely, he gained that relationship with them ... they respected him. And he tried new ways of teaching to excite them ... he made things exciting for them so that they grasped or understood it.”

The Head: What Exemplary AE Teachers Know

Aroha described exemplary AE teachers as knowing their students very well. She believed that these teachers are particularly tuned into their students and how they present at any given moment. This requires AE teachers to be sensitive to out-of-character behaviours from young people, along with the ability to pick a time and space to address their concerns in a way that is likely to elicit the best response from the young person. An expectation is that if one member of the AE tutor team notices a young person is out-of-sorts that this be subtly communicated to the rest of the team so that all of the adults can be aware and responsive. She added:

“I noticed this morning one of our students is a bit off, very quiet when he came in this morning ... I want to take him aside later on and just see how he is.... So, instantly we pick those things up ... you can tell in their tone or the way that they talk to the tutor ... [a tutor] will take them aside and talk to them individually to see what’s happening for them. Sometimes it’s like the kid will explode ... she just needs to calm down first. So, we try not to do it in front of the others if we can.”

Knowing oneself and having lots of authentic featured a lot when Aroha talked about exemplary practice in AE, she also commented on the AE students' perceptiveness. “You don't have to put up a façade because they can see right through that façade. And they can tell if you are interested in them or not. They tend to pick that up straightaway.” Aroha talked about being direct and honest with the learners from their very first interview for the AE programme and again references the young peoples' perceptiveness. “They [AE tutors] can’t lie and the thing is the kids know, they tend to know who’s a liar and who’s not so it’s like just speaking straight up.”

The theme of authenticity arose again when Aroha talked about being “real” with the young people allowing the students to make a stronger connection with the staff, seeing their tutors as people. She believed:

“They [the students] can see hey you’re just as normal as my aunty, or my uncle or, as my mother or myself.... It’s because we do leave ourselves vulnerable, that we do open up to our kids ... they need to see that side of you, to say “oh you’re not just the teacher you have got kids. You have got a life outside of here.” ... So, they get to see you for who you are.”

People who work in this line of work understand there are risks and an emotional toll when connecting and caring for young people, many of whom experience poverty, violence and significant challenges in their everyday lives. Aroha said:

“We had a student that came to AE and then the following year she went back to mainstream school. We heard that she was doing well. Then I get a phone call probably six months down the track to say that she’d committed suicide ... So, for me it wasn’t until I probably was at the marae ... going on [to the marae] and was like whoa.”

The Heart: What Teachers Believe

Aroha explained the importance of AE tutors not personalising student behaviour. Aroha talks about how she interprets and processes learners’ behaviours which can sometimes be aggressive, affronting and directed at the AE staff:

“When they come in here angry, upset, tired, hungry and all that type of stuff, and if you say even “good morning” to them, they snap at you. Don’t hold it against them, it’s just the way they are. So, for me I never take that on board so it’s like “oh so you’re not feeling okay ... what’s happening? Can I help?”

When talking about how exemplary AE teachers manage behavioural issues, Aroha described the tutors acting as a “tag team” where different tutors would challenge poor student behaviour based on the tutor’s strengths. For example, Aroha herself is called on from time-to-time to “do a bit of blow up in front of the kids”; Aroha believes this is effective because this strategy is used very rarely so when she does let the students know she is not happy with them they take note. Aroha highlighted the importance of a strategic approach that takes into account factors such as timing:

“Sometimes some of the tutors are wanting us to deal with the battle straightaway and then it’s like leaving it and saying, “no this is not the right time.” So let it go and then will bring it up later on ... you know that if you probably say it now you’re going to lose the majority of the kids or there’s going to be a big uproar about it; but if you let it go now and then bring it up later there’s no uproar. It’s like knowing when to pick your battles ... and ... do you deal with them as a whole group or do you deal with them individually?”

Aroha believed that exemplary AE teachers do not just challenge behaviour, but they also

challenge the young people's ideas about the world around them. For example, Aroha described the benefit of one group of AE students being taught by a married couple, "the kids got to see a good relationship, how a relationship worked you know? And there were no arguments between these two, there was a lot of laughter."

In my anecdotal observations of AE, I have noted that many of the educators are of Māori or Pacific Island descent. When asked if tutor ethnicity was an important criteria for exemplary AE teachers, Aroha felt that it was not. However, the tutors own cultural identity and openness to other cultures was identified as important in exemplary practitioners. Aroha spoke about an exemplary AE teacher she had worked alongside who came from a different country and cultural background to the students:

"I think for the tutors that come on board it's knowing who they are themselves. Being strong in their own tikanga whether they're Pākehā, whether they're South African or whatever, knowing their own culture and being able to express in their culture ... I think for him [the tutor] too he was open to Māori culture as well you know? He never brushed it aside, he learnt words, he learned as much as he could, and I think it's just cultures between cultures. You know, wanting to learn from one another that made it."

Aroha explained that exemplary AE teachers walk alongside their students. Aroha pointed out that AE tutors often dress casually; for example, jeans and a t-shirt, in comparison to some mainstream teachers. Aroha stated this is "because our teachers or our tutors get involved with the kids, so when they're playing sport together, they're playing sport together." Aroha also talked about role modelling prosocial behaviour to the young people in an authentic context:

"One thing that I do like here is that if we're wrong then we're not afraid to apologise to the kids, because if we apologise to the kids the kids see us doing that then they themselves do that as well."

Aroha mentioned a few times in her interview that many AE teachers and tutors don't find their feet right away. Often it takes a school term or two, or more, for the teacher and the young people to connect, this requires AE educators to persevere through this forming period in order to build the necessary relationships with the learners. She added:

"I think for some people it's when they come here it's how much grit and determination you've got.... Sometimes you have to sort of like

outlast them.... I think you've got to be just as stubborn and not give up ... you'll make that connection with them or one day it's sort of like that whole fog is going to be lifted from the kids and they're going to actually see you and it's like yay now I can teach you."

The Hand: What Exemplary AE Teachers Do

The topic of cultural identity and connection came up in Aroha's interview a number of times, both in reference to the educators and the learners. Aroha noted that many of the students in AE don't feel a connection to their culture, "they don't know about their marae, they've never been onto their marae ... so they are missing out ... no connection you know?"

Aroha talked about the power of food in AE, not just in meeting the young people's basic needs, but also as a tool for connecting their wider AE community; for example, students' families, the local community, and other stakeholders. She explained the issue as below:

"Food seems to be the main thing here in AE ... having that food and bringing the kids together or making sure that they are fed because normally they come to school, they're not fed.... Sometimes they don't eat it here so I pass it on when a parent comes in, I say "oh would you like some?".... That's what you do."

4.3 Data Stories: Alternative Education Teachers

The two highly effective alternative education teachers interviewed for this research were recommended by the AE leader participants. Both were AE teachers in Christchurch AE programmes for five or more years at different times and both have since moved on to other positions within the wider education sector.

4.3.1 Pūmahara's Data Story

Pūmahara - thoughtful, learned, wise, perceptive, sagacious, astute.

Pūmahara's Journey into Alternative Education

Pūmahara is a male in his 60s who immigrated to Aotearoa New Zealand in the mid 1990s. Prior to coming to New Zealand Pūmahara had a background in the corporate world. On arriving in Christchurch, a member of Pūmahara's family suggested that, with his ability to speak multiple languages, teaching could be a good option for a new career.

Pūmahara went on to train as a secondary school teacher. On completion of his qualifications, Pūmahara applied for more than 60 teaching positions and never received one interview. “I couldn’t get a job because ... who would want to hire a foreign sounding name?... So, I never got any interview at all.” Pūmahara refused to change the name his mother had gifted him. Eventually Pūmahara was offered work as a teacher through a contact he had made at a local secondary school. However, Pūmahara decided to return to work in his home country where “I’m paid three times more than a [New Zealand] teacher.”

A couple of years later Pūmahara returned to Aotearoa New Zealand and was quickly made aware of a unique teaching opportunity in alternative education. Soon after submitting his application, Pūmahara received a last-minute phone call requesting he attend an interview later that day. He won the position and taught in AE for the next five years. He began the interview:

“I come from a corporate world ... but because I come from poverty, I thought to myself “I know some of the characteristics of these kids.” All around the world if you come from poverty you carry a certain characteristic, it’s called *survival* [emphasis added]. You will utilise every intelligence and cleverness, not only to survive but to actually thrive. If you’re an achiever ... I think in AE there are quite a few achievers ... but on the wrong path, that’s all, on a path that eventually they’ll have to pay a price. So, I did have in my heart that working with these kids would probably suit me very well because I’ve been through those days when I was a kid. I started fighting on the street at the age of five or six, I’ve got scars on my face from all those [gang] fights so, I thought “I’ll give it a go” and that’s how I got into AE.”

Caring for the Carer in Alternative Education

Clinical supervision was not initially offered to Pūmahara. Pūmahara was able to access an external supervisor from a contributing school at no cost to the AE programme, even so he was met with some resistance from his AE programme manager when he requested the one hour per month needed to participate in supervision sessions. He described the situation as below:

“Supervision is important, and I cannot really stress how useful it has been for me because [supervisors name] was really very good at it.... I have lost two students in AE ... they turned 16 then they go within 12 months or a couple of years I lost two students. It’s a huge impact even though you think “well I have so many students that come and

go” ... but it’s still a human life.”

Throughout the interview, Pūmahara talked about the importance of AE teachers establishing strong relationships with the students but he also said “curiously you need to also learn how to detach from them when the day is over. Otherwise it saps a lot of your energy.”

Pūmahara believed that working in AE for an extended period of time has risks for a person’s wellbeing. He pointed out when working with young people who have experienced trauma there is a risk that “you may get tainted or you may start to skew one side in your thinking and your learning.” If Pūmahara was in power, he would require that “every three years I would enforce one-year paid leave [for AE tutors].... You have to go away and do something else, three years is max I will not allow you to do more than three years at a go.”

The Head: What Exemplary AE Teachers Know

Pūmahara explained that teachers must know what they don’t know. He believed they must have a good grasp of their own personal and professional limitations and be flexible in their thinking and their approach to teaching. This is particularly important in AE with its fluid roll meaning that students are coming and going throughout the school year. He continued:

“I think the best way is to have no expectations, zero expectations going in, work with what you have there right in front of you ... this is what I can work with, these are the limitations of ... my students, this is my limitation as a teacher.... So, in a sense that the teacher’s also learning about how to teach these kids and we know that ... in the middle of the year some new kids come in and the whole dynamic is changed. So, the teachers learning has to keep evolving you can’t insist this is the model that they we’ve done so successfully last term I’m going to continue with this. No. It cannot happen that way. So, AE teaching is really quite different from the conventional school.”

When learning how to best meet the needs of the students, Pūmahara suggested that teachers “just be really patient with them and listen”. However, Pūmahara pointed out that “when they say something do not assume that you actually understand them because they’ve got their own lingo, they have their own slang ... and a lot of their talk is actually attempting to conceal what is underneath.” In his interview Pūmahara shared how he uses paraphrasing and reflective questioning to establish or strengthen his rapport with a student. This approach is based upon the understanding that teachers are at risk of filtering what students say through their own adult lens; It is also underpinned by a belief that

what the young person is trying to communicate is very important, although at times, unpalatable. By paraphrasing what the young person has said, and checking their understanding, Pūmahara ensures that he is receiving the student's message accurately. Pūmahara gave an example of such a situation with a new AE student who had just sworn at him:

"I looked at him and said "correct me if I'm wrong. I think what you're really saying to me is that suddenly you are afraid of me because of a certain structure that you think I carry, an authority", then he nodded his head. Then I said, "I'm sorry, you know, I don't want to present to you that I have all this power here over you." Then immediately he relaxes. And remember this ... most of them [AE students] do not give any apologies, at all, because they have to be hard ... to survive out there they've got to be tough. So, lots of reflective statements reflecting back trying to find out exactly as to what they really mean when they say something it's very important."

Part of this approach requires that the teacher be tuned into more than the young person's words. Body language is also very important along with the teacher's ability to know when to back off. Pūmahara discussed:

"If they shake their head or say "nah" then you will have to try again, "so I am wrong. How about this, if I am to guess intelligently, what you are really saying is there are other things that you've encountered this morning that have caused you to be very uncomfortable inside, since this morning's event, before you arrived at school". Then they nod their head then I say, "ah okay, okay" their body language is really important. If they come forward then I can ask the next question, if they go back ... no, do not ask them anymore."

Pūmahara talked about getting to know the students beyond the school setting and identifies the value of building relational trust:

"[understand] how they are all moulded within events of their society and you go lower into the community, you go lower, you go into their families, you go lower you go into their peers, and you go deeper still you go into their inner world that exists inside them - which most of us have no access to that unless they truly trust you ... that's quite rare. Because no human beings will ever show all their weaknesses."

Pūmahara found his first two years in AE to be very difficult by having discovered that conventional methods of teaching would not work in this unique learning environment, “every day after the school I write little notes and whether this failed and that worked and this sucks”. Pūmahara was determined and dedicated many hours to refining his craft, “there was really a lot of work on my own that I put into looking at maths from different perspectives”. Pūmahara began to learn and memorise “maths magic” tricks, “I’d show them that I could predict certain numbers ... they would be amazed by it and they want to learn ... to show-off to their friends”. Activities such as this sparked the student’s interest and they began to engage in Pūmahara’s maths programme, “after two years I was able to hold them for sixty minutes inside the class and half the class wouldn’t want to leave the class. He continued:

“I tell them [learning maths magic] it’s not an easy path ... you’ve got to memorise this bit here, you’ve got to memorise that bit there, but I’ll teach you ... you memorise two bits first and you hold it in your mind. See learning is a beautiful thing. If you can hold the things in your mind and yet you can run with something else. And every brain has the capacity, but you need to train it.”

Pūmahara discovered that success in problem solving, along with the ability to impress their friends and family with their clever new skills, was highly motivating for AE students. With this in mind, Pūmahara utilised the “inverted funnel” approach to problem solving in his maths lessons. With this approach the teacher introduces a “very precise and clear”, step-by-step method of solving a given maths problem. Once they have mastered this single method, and experienced success, then the learner can explore other methods and applications for solving similar problems.

Pūmahara made sure that he knew what is happening in the young people’s lives outside of school and adapted his approach accordingly. To do this in AE, Pūmahara would follow a set structure for an hour-long maths lesson; this included dedicating the first 5 to 10 minutes assessing the young people’s state of mind. He discussed:

“I know that [specific student] has got problems so I’m aware of that ... I’m not going to flood them with more problems ... I needed to help sort out their thinking about what has happened in their lives in the morning before they came in. Before they can actually go into learning they have a storm inside their head if you don’t go and calm that bit, the whole day can be destroyed.... So that sensitivity, along with your pedagogical thinking, it’s a really fine interplay ... you move with them, you don’t move on your own and pull them all along, you have to move with them.”

Within the lesson, Pūmahara would include opportunities for students to practice known strategies, where they were likely to experience success, before introducing new content. Pūmahara would also show his students that he noticed and valued their participation and learning. “More so in AE than even conventional school, immediate feedback to the student is very crucial. A lot of them are highly, highly impatient. They want immediate gratification when it comes to learning.”

Pūmahara talked about the risks associated with working closely with youth-at-risk, “many of them do have really destructive habits. You must be ready for that.” Beyond the risks that the young people pose themselves, Pūmahara warned that teachers may find that working in this context can expose the teachers own personal issues:

“There are risks involved ... if you really want to get into AE teaching ... are you ready for these kind of risks? You may have even personal issues in your life that has been unresolved and then you see it in the kid, and you have no ability to help that kid because you haven’t helped yourself with that issue.... So, in AE teaching it is really, really important that you understand your strengths, your weaknesses. If you still carry issues and you may see some issues in the kids and you will have no ability to help them and you must admit that to yourself at least, if not to the others.”

This self-awareness is essential in Pūmahara’s opinion. He warned of the risks associated with being inauthentic in the AE setting:

“You need to go with a very versatile, and even amorphous, form of thinking where you need to assess the situation each day, or each moment, and then you make the kind of decision which is best suited ... to yourself first because otherwise you will be depleted of whatever energy you have. Do not deplete yourself as a teacher going in. If you deplete your energy you will not be able to give the best to these kids and if you’re not yourself the amount of energy needed to sustain that kind of role that you’re trying to play will not last very long. You have to be real with these kids, you’ve got to be ... quite honest with these kids.”

The Heart: What Teachers Believe

Although Pūmahara believed that he can make a difference in young people’s lives, this belief

is balanced with the understanding that he was not responsible for saving them. Pūmahara talked about the many tutors he saw come and go during his years in AE. He attributed some of the tutor-burnout he witnessed to adults entering this world with the idea that they would “save” these young people:

“Don’t go in there with the idea that you’re going to save them ... because that immediately causes your mind to narrow.... And you don’t want to go in with a structured thinking because when it doesn’t work you it will demolish you; you will not build resilience.... So, don’t go in with a “I am going to save you” model.”

As well as rethinking and reworking his approaches to teaching mathematics, Pūmahara also altered his ideas about what these students should achieve during their time in his class:

“It doesn’t matter if they can’t get their different levels [national qualifications] or whatever ... maybe they’re not ready at this stage ... maybe they will be ready five years down the road that they want to learn about this seriously now. At this stage of their lives, especially when they first come into AE ... their lives are ... like a boat in a storm.”

While not placing great importance on AE students achieving national credits and qualifications, there was one thing that Pūmahara did believe was essential to learn for AE students:

“They [the students] picked up so many habits along their tender years of living, and those habits that they’ve picked up frequently actually work against them so, we need to give them something which helps them to grow in a way that allows them to understand themselves - more so that they can decide which direction that they want to grow towards. They have to make the decision, in the end we cannot make that decision for them, and we must not make that decision for them, because we are not the masters of their lives. They are the masters of their lives and we have to remind them, through us teaching them that the mastery of your own life is the most crucial thing; nothing else is more important than the mastery of your own life, that is exactly what I want to teach them.”

Pūmahara suggested that life mastery could be the answer to some of our country’s biggest social and economic problems:

“I think I can quite confidently say that a ... truly successful life is when you have mastery over your own life.... the decisions you make, although there will be mistakes along the way, you are able to handle them, rectify them, but most of the time it is a life that leads you towards ... happiness or satisfaction.... I feel if you can give it to the young people mastery over their lives is the most crucial thing. If this can be transmitted over, I think once and for all maybe New Zealand would not have to spend billions of dollars building bigger and better prisons.... Yes, because these people have not got mastery over their lives, somebody has to take charge of their life in a special place.”

Pūmahara pointed out that AE teachers may not witness significant positive change in their students immediately, at all, or many years after the young person leaves AE. Pūmahara believed that teachers should make peace with this and realise that this is the young person’s journey – not theirs. He continued:

“I’ve seen teachers go in and say, “this is the way” ... “if you want to achieve stability and happiness.” No, no, no there are many paths ... some paths ... really full of ... pitfalls and more falls, but then as they go along ... the wobble is less and less and they learn a lot more, and then towards the middle part of their life ... some characters in society ... you don’t expect them to survive that long but they have transformed and evolved because their learning has been deep, their learning has been profound.”

Pūmahara recognised that it may be difficult to empathise with AE learners if you have never been “homeless for a while because you got kicked out of the family and you roam the streets a bit”; or if you “don't know what real hunger is all about”; or “why kids are so attracted to certain cars”. Being aware of, and having empathy for, the struggles some AE students experience is important; however, Pūmahara strongly felt that teachers should not pity these young people:

“Some of the teachers who come into AE they have a certain sense of pity. Don’t pity these kids ... they cannot eat pity, they don’t feed on pity, pity only makes them weak. You can empathise with them ... you must understand some of the things that they have lived through.”

Pūmahara felt the teachers best suited to working in AE believe that there are many variations of life, that there is no one pathway to a life well led:

“Yes, if you have just one model of life, don’t go in [to AE], because there are so many different variations ... and if you have just one model you may see that these kids are just all drifting towards the wrong model. What you want to do in the teaching is to be creative enough for them to pick up the creativity and create their own model, and their model may not be perfect, or their model may not meet your expectations, but that is their life; that’s their model and if they live it with passion, they live it with love, they live it with the kind of happiness that they can gather, finally, that’s wonderful.”

The Hand: What Exemplary AE Teachers Do

Pūmahara identified the ability to build a powerful relationship with the students as essential for AE teachers:

“I think the skillset for teaching AE students is very different from mainstream school. It is less of the pedagogical or the technical stuff at the beginning. In the beginning one of the most crucial things that you need is for them to accept you, and not the reverse ... your ability to relate to them in some way which they can understand, and they can feel it.”

During his interview, Pūmahara gave a number of examples of when his AE students indicated to him that they could see him beyond his position as an outsider, both in relation to ethnicity and profession:

“So, they have changed in their perception of me because of my relationship with them, and then I know our relationship has transcended to a level where we are beginning to see each other as human beings now and that’s really important.”

Pūmahara believed that establishing a relationship with the student must be the first priority, however he explains that in the AE context there is a fine art to doing this. Pūmahara likened this initial relationship building to that of approaching a skittish cat:

“You don’t go stretching out and reaching them immediately you need to be patient. You need to wait. You need to observe them because each one of them is so different.... So, you have to wait for that moment and that moment is really strange because it’s very amorphous. You need to feel it, that this is the moment to connect

with them and you must understand that that initial connection is very tenuous because they are very fragile people. These are the fragile people that have broken ... at home ... or at school.”

Pūmahara recognised that these young people “have been betrayed ... lied to, kicked about and ... dumped ... they can’t trust the next person.” Pūmahara explains that AE teachers need to walk alongside their students to establish a trusting relationship. He used the analogy of a plant:

“If they trust you, their roots will grow towards you; you will be like water and nutrients in the soil. They will grow towards you, but if you think you are so special, up on a pedestal, the roots are not going to grow upwards it grows downwards and underneath. And if the kids can see you like water and nutrients to the plants, then you have that connection.”

Pūmahara described AE students’ lives as “unpredictable” suggests that teachers provide predictability in the AE learning environment. “We need to give them something predictable, that if I do this it’s quite predictable; This is mostly like going to happen, but if I do this, that is most likely going to happen, it’s predictable.”

Pūmahara believed that “humour and laughter” in the classroom setting as a “very important and powerful tool” for both his mainstream students but even more so for AE students. In Pūmahara’s experience “when human beings are laughing and are happy, aggression can barely have any foothold in their brain.” Pūmahara would tell “little stories like that combined with humour” about his younger days. Pūmahara would tell his story in a very deliberate way, “I describe it very slowly.” He finds that the students will engage in conversation about his stories “because if you are really connected with them ... they have also developed an empathy, even for your past life.” In these discussions the young people talk about how events could have unfolded differently or “what could I [the young Pūmahara] have done better.” Here we see that Pūmahara not only used humour strategically to diffuse and manage potentially aggressive behaviours, but also to engage the young peoples in strategic thinking. In this regard he added:

“I think once they can empathise with you ... they have moved from alpha to beta in their thinking and that’s a time where you have a very high probability of teaching them and that they want to learn whatever you want to teach them. This alpha and beta state of mind is really very

important.”

When reflecting and relaying experiences of when students enjoyed his lessons and did not want to leave his class, Pūmahara speculated:

“Maybe because they think it’s fun, maybe because they think it’s really safe in my class, maybe because they think that there is laughter in my class - meaning that there is some modicum of happiness. You know when you go to school you want to be happy ... you truly want to be happy. This is why kids go to school more for the reason of socialising because they want to be happy sometimes they call it freedom. You have to give them ... that sense of real freedom - without being destructive, without being aggressive, without being spiteful.”

Pūmahara believed one of the most important roles of an AE teacher is to build happy memories with the students:

When we were young we built in loads and loads of happy memories of interactions, of activities ... of the friends that you met along the way ... if you have lots of that [happy memories] it’s like a massive anchor because the sea above you ... could be rocking like hell but if you have built this massive load ... of happy memories ... whatever rocks you above, that rope that holds you right down to that anchor ... when the storm above ... the tempest is going wild ... you will be rocked but you will be held quite firm and steady.

Throughout his interview Pūmahara’s talked fondly of his own happy memories that he still holds dear from his time in AE.

4.3.2 Anaheara’s Data Story

Anaheara – angel

Anaheara’s journey into alternative education

Anaheara is a female of Māori descent in her 40s. Anaheara, trained as a primary school teacher, and went into alternative education with a Master of Education qualification. Anaheara taught in alternative education for around seven years, in the last five years of her time she held both a teaching

tutor role and a management support role. Anahera is currently working within a tertiary institution training preservice teachers.

Anahera had been a practicing primary school teacher for about 13 years prior to her involvement in alternative education. In her last two years in mainstream teaching she had been establishing and teaching in a bilingual unit in an English medium school. When changes to the school structure adversely affected the sustainability of the bilingual unit Anahera began to look for other opportunities. Through a family member, and other networks, Anahera heard about a teaching position in a faith-based organisation with a strong focus on kaupapa Māori (Māori ideology). “I actually didn’t know that alternative education existed even though I’d been teaching for a long time.”

In transitioning from mainstream teaching into alternative education Anahera noted a few key differences, a number of these differences related to how AE was funded, “you weren’t paid the same ... I’m not getting paid financially but the reward is ... you’re getting paid in lots of other ways.” A non-monetary benefit Anahera experienced whilst teaching in AE included the experience of working in a completely unique learning context, both personal and professional development. In fact, Anahera would like to see preservice teachers being placed in AE centres as part of their training. She added:

“It would be great to see universities or training institutions put more emphasis on teachers going into AE as part of their practicum wouldn’t it be great for all teachers?... Where they can see how that work and just how important relationships are ... some of the things you can do in terms of behaviour management strategy ... not just having a teacher hat, having a youth development hat on and support worker hat on.”

Caring for the Carer in Alternative Education

Anahera identified internal and external supervision as “real important – super, super important” in maintaining her wellbeing and resilience whilst teaching in AE. This supervision and support went beyond the professional teaching practice aspect of the work:

“AE runs into your personal life because you’re invested in so much more than just the day-to-day school hours.... I think for me that was good, having people who could probably see when I needed to take a break or a rest or maybe need to change gear, and people who obviously had your best interest at heart ... kept me aware of my own capacity.”

Despite the importance and benefits of having internal and external supervision, Anahera talked

about the difficulty of making the time to participate in supervision sessions with an already full workload. Ensuring Anahera made herself a priority was an important role of her support network. She explained how she taught about support:

“I think it’s important that you’ve got people that keep you accountable to actually making sure that you meet up to prioritise your needs ... because of staff burn-out ... [the work] it is exhausting and there’s so much pressure and you are dealing with some really complex situations and whānau stories and it’s all quite demanding.”

When asked what her friends, colleagues and family thought about her move into alternative education, Anahera explained that many of her loved ones didn’t understand what alternative education was. By including her friends and family in the AE programme “whānau celebrations and evenings” Anahera was able to generate a lot of interest in what was happening for the young people she was working with in AE. Anahera was proactive in recruiting people to work with her students. These roles and opportunities included teacher aiding, mentoring, work-experience, and industry training. She discussed the roles as below:

“You’d just recognise that in AE you’d have very little financial resourcing, but most people don’t do it for the finances they weren’t doing it for anything, they weren’t on the payroll, but just recognised actually these young people need adults in their lives, significant others who, obviously, they don’t have.”

Operating as Part of a Team

Anahera agreed that the ability to work in a collaborative environment was very important when working with these young people. On entering AE Anahera embraced the opportunity to work within an AE tutor team, but also working within the wider organisation. “We had a kaumātua (elder), myself and another staff member ... we had health workers, support workers, youth workers, and we had lots and lots of volunteers.” Anahera also commented on the implications of working within an interdisciplinary environment with other professionals, “as a teacher sometimes you’re so good just doing things on your own.” She added:

“So many more interdisciplinary people were involved so ... you are dealing with so many people with the young person ... lots of different case workers and it’s quite a complex system. In English medium [mainstream school] you probably don’t have access to all those

people, you're not directly dealing with them."

Anahera explained that being part of a team was not enough in itself, "it's also important that you function as a team, just because you can have lots of people that doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be more effective." Anahera frequently referenced working from a "strengths-based perspective" and described a staff assessment tool designed to identify and define people's strengths. Each member of her AE team completed this assessment and shared their findings with the wider team. Learning about each other's strengths helped the team members to understand and appreciate one another:

"You get to find out how everyone works in your team and how you best collaborate.... We knew exactly who our positive people were ... who were our people that needed to know the details straightaway, who are the people that we could go to that would just get the job done."

Anahera also explained the role the AE team played in terms of supporting each other's wellbeing, again alluding to the idea that working as an effective team is not always straight forward or easy:

"We checked in daily.... Everyone [in the team] kind of knew where everyone was at.... We were all really honest in terms of: this is how we are, this is on top for me, and this is the pressure I'm feeling at the moment ... recognising when someone needs to maybe get to the front a bit more and when we need to take a little bit of a step back.... Yes, having a really good team made a big difference and you'd go through different seasons where the team would be really thriving ... and times you just need to work through some team things."

The Head: What Exemplary AE Teachers Know

Throughout Anahera's interview, the concept of development from a holistic perspective was a reoccurring theme in relation to herself, her AE colleagues, and her AE students. Knowledge of self and a desire to know the student was another theme. When asked to comment on how she would induct a new student into the programme, Anahera explained an approach that came from a place of genuine curiosity and strength-based affirmation:

"We spent lots of time building relationally with each young person before we tried to chuck in any learning and we really got to know them and also got to know their strengths [the tutors would be]

interested in who they are, what they bring, what their strengths are, so we'd spend a long time developing that at the start getting to know them, talking to them, hearing their strengths and also hearing the things that they might not yet know that they're good at. So, they come in and they're talking about their siblings they've looked after. We recognise "oh they've got really good sense of manaakitanga (caring) ... they've got all these wonderful leadership strengths already."

Anahera's AE tutor team didn't just employ a strength-based approach to tutor team dynamics or students interests and abilities, it was also applied with consideration to the unique relationships between tutors and their students. Often tutors were formally or informally assigned a student to work closely. This was usually because the tutors had developed a strong rapport with the young person and the young person's support network. If this young person was experiencing some kind of difficulty the tutor would "pull them aside and just say 'hey, what's up?' ... just have a really good chat to them, take them away, go for a drive somewhere." These chats were often enlightening for the tutor, "when you heard their story it's like, no wonder you acted like you did." This would be followed up with an acknowledgment that the young person coped in the best way they knew how in that particular situation. The conversation would soon lead to ideas and strategies the young person might employ in the future if a similar situation was to arise. She discussed as below:

"Once you've built the relationship, they can be quite remorseful and actually really sorry we did lots of restorative justice so if something happened with a student that involved another student it would be an opportunity for them to ... hui (come together and meet) and also work through that process of restoring a relationship and what do they now need to do to restore with a bigger group, with the whānau, we had lots and lots of whānau hui (family meetings)."

Anahera pointed out that recognising a member of the team has a particular strength or a strong relationship with a student must be considered within the wider context of the collective. She believed that it is important that no individual tutor would be:

"trying to do it on their own. ... recognising that they are part of a team and you always want the young person to see that we're a team "every time you hurt or disrespect my colleague that's actually hurting and disrespecting me."... I think for the students, the young people, it was important to see that every time, when things are going

well or not going well, we're a team here. So, we have got each other's backs, yep I think that's good for the students to see. And it's kept us safe as well."

Along with knowledge of the student, Anahera believed that exemplary AE tutors have good self-awareness and are grounded. When talking about an exemplary colleague she simply described "someone who obviously knows who they are and are secure in who they are."

Anahera advocated for thinking differently about outcomes in relation to traditional school expectations:

"Your outcomes look a lot different, whether the students attending, whether the students come with a positive disposition not that you lower your expectations but ... we weren't so interested in outcomes at the start. We were more interested in them as a person and helping them to build them up and help them to come to a place where ... they could learn we're looking at holistic point of view."

Whilst explaining the importance of teachers knowing their students beyond the classroom setting, Anahera challenged the idea that it was the young people who were disengaged, perhaps it was the adults. When talking about new enrolments into alternative education Anahera noted that "when they came to us, they were actually really engaged (in learning)." She then went on to suggest that perhaps the label of 'disengaged' should sit with the teachers, "I would probably contend that maybe teachers and staff are disengaged ... they didn't engage in the students' lives."

Anahera was mindful of the risks inherent when working with youth-at-risk, "aware that there's some huge risk all the time and especially if there's substance abuse or whānau involved as well." She described two key protective factors that helped her to feel safe in this sometimes-volatile space, one of these factors being the team of tutors working to their strengths:

"I think that's when the team was really good, rarely would we have had to deal with something that was probably over your head ... most times you relied on the team, people to come in and work to their strengths. When we needed a good negotiator, someone to help with restorative, we needed someone to be physical to restrain the student you know, I think we relied on the team quite a bit to just make some calls on the spot."

Anahera also identified the established culture and values held by the young people as a collective, positive peer pressure being a powerful influence in maintaining a safe space in AE:

“Most times our students would jump in and say “Oi! Don’t you speak to [tutors name] like that!” So, you often had the backing of the students ... you didn’t really need to come in, take that hard line. Students know that actually, you know, if you mess with this person you mess with the whole class.”

With this dynamic in mind, the AE tutors needed to be cognisant of a number of dynamics when bringing a new student into the group:

“With the newcomers I think we just had to be really careful about how we integrated new people to the whānau and what that integration process might look like. Because often that was tricky bringing people in what colour [representing gang affiliation] they’d been, where they’re from, so those are kind of some of the times we had to be quite intentional about how we bring people into the whānau.”

The Heart: What Teachers Believe

Anahera described an “ethos of care” as central to exemplary AE teachers’ practice. This genuine care for the students helped the tutors to persevere through the challenges posed by working with youth-at-risk and not “throw in the towel.” Care for the students underpinned a great deal of what was happening in the AE programme.

Anahera explained that exemplary AE educators need to be “non-judgemental”, people who “weren’t shocked that things happen.” Here Anahera explained that exemplary AE tutors are required to keep their composure in the midst of chaos and see beyond the surface of an incident, particulars behaviours, or the reputation these young people carry with them, “to see past some of those layers”: she added an example:

“An example of that might be when you get a big file (from the referring school) they’ve got all these things ... they’re coming with all this baggage ... someone who can actually have a quick look [at the school file] ... but ... that doesn’t taint how they see the young person.”

Again, Anahera explained that she and her team paid relative disregard to the “file” that often

accompanied a newly referred student to the programme. During her time in AE Anahera was struck by:

“How important your role is as a teacher, how much influence you have ... to really champion a young person. How you can easily crush them and things like the power of your words and making sure that the words that you speak are edifying and encouraging and building up a young person as opposed to thinking and labelling.”

With this in mind, Anahera and her team acted intentionally to remove labels from their students and lessen the impact of the student’s previous educational history and reputation. She described what she and her team did:

“The one thing we did is we tried to remove any labels and we made sure they knew that they had a fresh start ... often, they hear they’ve got a fresh start but then they [adults] can go back and say, “oh but you did the same thing you did last month.”

When Anahera reflected on how her own practice in this area evolved, as a result of her experience teaching in AE, she hoped that she “would have a lot more grace now” as opposed to immediately enforcing a consequence for poor behaviour. Anahera hoped that she would apply “a little bit more patience to unpack their situation.” Anahera explained that the ability to remain calm under pressure allows a teacher to “not to react ... just really quickly try to deescalate the situation.” This calm disposition gives the teacher the presence of mind to deal strategically with an incident:

“Let’s make sure everyone else is safe, but not to try and fix it straight away because often it was a part of the bigger picture; and trying to get to the bottom of some of the bigger picture things is really important because it would be really easy just to slam them with another consequence.”

Anahera identified a sense of humour and humility as important characteristics of exemplary AE teachers. An ability to not “take things too seriously.” Anahera acknowledges that AE teachers deal with some serious situations and should this be balanced with the ability to “keep a good humour and ... not take things personal if a student does something or says something.”

Although Anahera looked beyond the face value of student’s behaviour and school records the students were made aware that their place on the AE programme was not an entitlement. In this way,

she explained that enrolling and buying into the programme became the student's choice:

“It was important that students knew they were privileged to attend our centre. So it wasn't just a right that they had because we could at any time decline the student ... so we said to students “right this is our value and you are signing up to these and if that's something you're happy with great, if not you're very welcome to go to other places and maybe might find a better fit for you.” So, they bought into what we offered, and it was important that they agreed to that ... sometimes students get lumped in AE places and they don't want to be there ... I don't think it's fair that you have to take them [into the AE programme] if they don't want to be there, because already it's a bit of a broken relationship.”

Anahera genuinely believed that her students have great potential, existing gifts and abilities. Anahera looks to find these attributes in her students and, furthermore, seeks to acknowledge and celebrate these. These strengths are not restricted to academic abilities and accordingly Anahera would like to see AE programmes being judged for more than the more easily quantifiable academic outcomes. When Anahera talked about students, she often alluded to a reciprocal learning partnership and perspective between the teacher and the learners:

“Often students don't know they've got all these strengths and they have never heard people promote them or be encouraging them so at the start you're just becoming their biggest cheerleader and you're reminding that they're valued ... we've got lots to learn from them and they have got so much to offer our programme as well. Sometimes you think you are providing this great service and look at us doing all this wonderful stuff for them, but they actually enrich your programme as well.”

Anahera's AE programme operated within a wider organisation with a strong kaupapa Māori focus. Anahera acknowledged that the organisation had a large percentage of Māori and Pasifika staff, when asked if ethnicity was a feature of exemplary AE teachers Anahera shared her thoughts:

“I don't know if whakapapa Māori (Māori ancestral links) meant that you could only connect with Māori, I think having someone who had a heart for Māori - recognising that we predominantly work with Māori young people - made quite a difference.... I do think we have

responsibility here in Aotearoa to ensure that we have a culturally competent staff in terms of being responsive and having a really good understanding of the bicultural journey we're on ... we talk here at [current institute] all the time: what's good for Māori is good for non-Māori but what's good for non-Māori students isn't necessarily good for Māori students. So, recognising that tailoring things with Māori values and Māori worldview would be beneficial to non-Māori as well it's not necessarily the whakapapa (Māori genealogy) that made young Māori people connect; I think it's that relationship and being able to connect through all sorts of things ... sport, music, culture."

The Hand: What Exemplary AE Teachers Do

One thing that featured heavily in her interview was that Anahera and her AE colleagues worked hard to be engaged with the friends, families and communities of their students. From early contact with a newly referred student's support networks, alongside regular contact from the tutors and a number of opportunities for families to engage with the programme and celebrate the learner's success she said:

"At the start students have to come with their whānau, whatever whānau looks like whether you have flatmate, friend ... they knew that we actually care about them and their whānau.... We'd have like termly whānau celebrations and bring whatever whānau you could. And we tried to get whānau involved as much as they could as part of the programme so yep like their grandparents might come and help weaving, or the mum might come and help with some cooking."

Anahera and her colleagues experienced some unique challenges in engaging family within the alternative education context. For example, for young people who were in state care and were only supported by a social worker or foster caregiver. In Anahera's experience these relationships could be fraught and the presence of these adults could be counterproductive in establishing a good rapport with the new student. It was also not unusual for AE students to have parents who had limitations such as being sentenced by the courts to home detention where they could not physically attend meetings or events at the programme. One way the AE tutors were able to support students in these situation was to create a sense of family within the programme itself:

"We tried to really engage with whānau and likewise we tried to let

the students be part of our whānau so we'd bring our tamariki in or had kaumātua ... we had tried to bring in you know all our friends and whānau so that if they didn't have a whānau they could kind of be part of our whānau."

An issue that Anahera noted in the AE contact was a number of young Māori students having no connection to their culture, "... a lot of our Māori students ... didn't have any connection to their Māori side ... they would often shy away from it, there would be lots of pain and shame." Anahera and her team didn't just seek to engage and strengthen the students existing support networks and family, but they also sought to establish new connections. In this way students were able to support students to explore their own identity, cultural connectivity, and sense of belonging beyond the classroom setting. She supported her ideas as below:

"We spend a lot of time at the start helping them identify who they are and who they bring in terms of their pepeha (saying of the ancestors), their mihimihi (speech of greeting), whānau connection and as we know most of the young people you know don't have whānau connections or they do but they're broken or they've got a lot of pain or hurt or you know all sorts of things that that's quite a complicated process. We'd try to get them to identify who they are, where they belong and connect. We're fortunate that we've lots of Māori students and can kind of help them journey through their whakapapa and helping to strengthen their genealogy even though they might have some broken relations along the way but try to remind them that they were from this great chief from here and they have this strong tipuna (ancestor) and this amazing mountain and they have all their journeys that our people have been on."

In the face of drastically less access to funding a resources than the mainstream schools, she had previously taught in, Anahera found she was forced to "make resources or be resourceful." She continued:

"Recognising when you come into alternative education you have such little resourcing in school you've got access to lots of resources, you have access to RTLBs (resource teachers of learning and behaviour), support workers, access really quickly to get funding, you know there's so much more involvement with the Ministry (MOE) in terms of the support that they offer. I think going to AE I was initially shocked at how much work you have to do or wraparound

work but how under resourced it was ... I remember the first day I was like “where are the students’ stationery? Where are the books? Where are the pens?” ... they didn’t have anything, just like a little pen here and a pen there ... we don’t have desks, we don’t have computers ... just basic resources, to do basic things, weren’t available.”

Anahera very much enjoyed the ability the AE tutors had to be flexible and responsive to the needs of both staff and students. With relative autonomy on how they structured the school day Anahera and her team could make decisions such as heading outdoors to play sports or going taking the young people to the beach to surf, “let’s do something fun that fills everyone up - students and staff.”

4.4 Data Stories: Alternative Education Students

This section presents the data stories of two former alternative education students. Both former student participants expressed concern that they had little value to add to the project, however these concerns were allayed during the interviews when the conversations flowed, and I assured them that their experiences and opinions were valid and often mirrored those of the other participants. Unlike the leaders and teachers these two participants only have the one encounter with AE educators and one AE programme each.

4.4.1 Whetū’s Data Story

Whetū - star

Whetū’s Journey into Alternative Education

Whetū is a female of Māori and Pacific Island descent in her 30s. Whetū attended alternative education and decided that school was not for her. She started as below:

“I just don’t think I wanted to be in the classroom ... being in the classroom for that amount of time, and I’m still the same now as an adult, just did my head in. Being in a secluded area for that long, I don’t think my attention span at that age was coping much.”

Whetū left AE after about one year attending. At 18 years old, with a then six-month-old baby, Whetū enrolled in teacher training and earned a certificate in teaching, graduating with distinction. Whetū was still very young so used this achievement to apply for special admission into the degree programme, to which she was accepted. Due to personal circumstances Whetū was forced to leave the programme during her final placement. Having to make this decision was devastating for Whetū, “I

cried ... I thought I wanted it so bad.” Whetū is now a married, mother of two and owns and runs a successful business in the wellbeing industry where, she believes, her teacher training gave her an edge over her competitors. Through her business Whetū continues to work with children and young people in an instructor capacity. During her interview Whetū wondered if her decision to go into teaching could be attributed to her positive experience in alternative education, “maybe it was AE. Because it definitely wasn’t high school ... I hated school; I couldn’t stand it.”

Exemplary Teachers

Whetū had two “really good” teachers, she remembered from primary and intermediate school. One taught maths and one taught physical education (PE), her two favourite subjects “I liked maths and PE. And I liked lunchtime.” Initially, Whetū couldn’t “remember any teachers from high school.” However, it occurred to her there was one teacher from high school that she did remember. She explained:

“The only teacher I remember actually was my PE teacher.... I had a cool connection with him because he was a cool person as well. But I can’t remember anyone else through high school, not one other teacher, can’t even remember the principal’s name, nothing. So, there were no standouts for me. They just seemed the same at that age.”

Although Whetū couldn’t remember the names and details of her schoolteachers she clearly remembers feeling that they were not “friendly” or “kind” to her. Combined with her experiences of her own children’s teachers, Whetū shared her thought about some teacher’s career choices:

“Honestly, I just think that some teachers ... just shouldn’t be in the job. Like you just shouldn’t be in a job like that ... the love and the passion for teaching ... I can see ... it just isn’t there.”

The Head: What Exemplary AE Teachers Know

Whetū believed that young people are highly preceptive and this understanding influences Whetū’s own practice as an adult. Whetū always approaches a new group of students with confidence, simply as herself:

“I be me. And I think they see that. I’m genuine ... I just be me. But I know I’m cool enough being me is well [laughs] I’m cool enough to do this, but I never ever stand up and speak like I always sit down. When I am speaking to them, I will sit them down on the ground then

I sit down.”

When asked to talk about how she remembers her AE tutors dealing with poor student behaviour, Whetū recalled the tutors looking beyond the surface behaviour:

“I always remember it being ... a nicer approach ... a compromising approach ... a situation that could be sorted out. More of a caring approach rather than ... just a consequence. So, more trying to actually sort the problem out, what’s going on here? What actually happened?”

The Heart: What Exemplary AE Teachers Believe

Attending AE kept Whetū busy during a period of her life when she admitted that she wasn’t known for making good choices. Whetū explained that the positive outcomes from attending AE weren’t evident at the time because “you didn’t get on track, because you don’t really get on track while your there, because I was really still a little ratbag.” There are very few options for young people under 16 years old not attending school. Whetū acknowledged that if for that year of her life she hadn’t been attending AE, that things “could’ve been worse, it could have been way worse.

Although Whetū remembers her AE tutors as “kind” and gave the impression that they “cared” for their students, she remembered that they had rules and expectations of the students. Whetū described this experience in contrast to her experience in a mainstream secondary school where she, essentially, felt invisible:

“I think that AE teachers are much more kind ... more understanding ... still stern though. There were still rules we had to follow. It was still a stern environment. But just a lot more understanding and friendliness, to be honest, that made a hell of a difference. And a lot more care. Like you’re actually cared for in that environment. And you’re not cared for at school really. Your kind of on your own, you just do your own thing. You’re rocking up there, showing up to your classes ... and if you don’t show up, you don’t show up. No one really cares. You can go in that environment and exit out whenever you want. And no one is watching or anything.”

Picking up on Whetū’s reference to the AE tutors being “stern”, I asked Whetū to elaborate:

“We always knew that there were rules, it wasn’t just a free ... do

whatever you want, you know? But the respect was gained because of the sternness and love. It was a good combination of both. And that's what I think we need for kids that age. You need to be stern, but you need the love, and the caring factor as well. That's probably why we ... enjoyed our time so much."

Whetū believed that teachers underestimate how much their students know, when Whetū entered AE she recalled assessing each of the tutors very quickly:

"They [AE students] are way smarter than whatever you think ... [as a student] you can pick who's on your side and ... you know you're going to spend the majority of your time with ... while you're in that classroom. You know who you can go to, you know who you can't go to, you know who is going to make you laugh, you know who to stay away from."

Later Whetū talked about exemplary AE teachers in reference to them supporting and interacting with the students, again, Whetū referenced young people's perceptiveness:

"At that age I knew who was on my side ... who was going to support me as a teacher and who wasn't ... you know what teacher is interacting with you as well, and when teachers don't interact with you, you can see it. I think some of those teachers were just shut off ... not really friendly."

The Hand: What Exemplary AE Teachers Do

Whetū talked about the relationship between the AE teacher and the AE students as paramount. Throughout the interview, she used the words engage, rapport, and connect, frequently and interchangeably:

"They probably don't know how important their jobs are. You have to have to build the rapport, you have to have someone in there front lining that can relate that can connect and engage 'cause that's the only way you can make a difference in their lives - you're just another bloody teacher at the end of the day if you're not doing that."

In her work as an adult Whetū sought out opportunities to work with you-at-risk. She felt a connection with them and believed their shared life experiences give her a unique ability to develop a

rapport with the young people, “I was one of them, so you see a lot of yourself in them.” She continued:

“You don’t win anything unless the rapport is built. There’re no wins, nothing is happening ... the engagement is not there ... if rapport is not built it the start ... good luck.”

Whetū believed that having this type of shared life experience helps youth-at-risk connect more readily with adults. When Whetū attended AE in the 2000s, most of her tutors were in their 20s and of Māori or Pacific Island descent. Whetū found it difficult to imagine what that year might have been like if the demographic of teachers was different. She explained feelings:

“Obviously, I’m Maori, I’m brown, so it makes a huge difference being able to relate to a teacher of the same colour. Because you think they understand you. So, it’s a cultural connection ... At that age I know that I could connect with brown people a lot easier. Because we share something in common.... I think the younger the better in that environment. As long as they are professional and have boundaries. We could relate because we had young AE teachers ... it’s all about rapport and relating to them.”

Whetū felt that how AE tutors present themselves matters to young people. She liked that her AE tutors dressed casually and feels like that if the teachers had been dressed more formally “it would have been a totally different relationship. Even me as an adult, if someone comes in a corporate suit, I’m straight away different. Like, we are going to have a totally different conversation because of how you look.” When pressed further about how important tutor dress when engaging with young people, Whetū talked about her own practice. Whetū explained that a young person’s perception might perceive a well-dressed adult as someone who thinks they are better than them.

“If I’m working with a group of rangatahi (young people) girls there is no way I am rocking up there dressed up or anything. No way, I’m trying to come down to their level I’m not trying to come above them ... when you’re that age you see it straight away ... I actually purposely just go in trackies and a hoodie ... I purposely do that. I don’t wear makeup ... I rock in there as myself. It’s the same working with boys as well ... you can build rapport with them a lot more when you’re not looked at like you’re better than them, that’s it.”

Whetū talked about the importance of having her AE course to go to during a turbulent period

in her life. She talked about a positive place to go to when life outside the classroom was not positive:

“You know you are different, even at that age you know you were different. You know you’ve done something to be there, you should be at school. You’re still seeing people in school uniforms you know you’re meant to be with them. I think you have to make the experience good for them, you have to engage properly, you have to build rapport properly you have to connect properly.... We were already in the shit at home. You know what I mean? Our parents were already pissed off at us. We were in a place that my parents never imagined me to be in ... we were already in shit, being in AE. We were meant to be at school. We had already disappointed our families. So, it has to be a safe place. You have to provide a safe, loving environment.”

The physical learning space in AE, although humble, was perfectly suited to Whetū’s learning preferences. There was movement, conversation, the option to sit on couches, and other rooms and spaces where the young people could complete their schoolwork. She believed:

“The setting of the classroom was a lot better because it wasn’t so ... bracketed ... it wasn’t so stagnant. Everything wasn’t the same. I think the setting mattered, the environment mattered and a lot more movement coming in and out. Because when you going into these classrooms in mainstream school you’ve got to stay put there ... you’re there for an hour you know what I mean? In AE there were people in and out all the time. So, if you’re an active person you enjoy environments like that, so I enjoyed that better. And you allowed to have conversation a lot more, you’re allowed to talk a lot more.”

In this unique learning environment, Whetū recalled how important it was for her that she felt comfortable asking the tutors for help or clarification:

Whetū: I think another thing is you’re able to ask questions. You’ve got a lot more confidence to be asking questions in that classroom than what you would in a mainstream classroom. There’s no way you put your hand up in a mainstream classroom at Year 9.

Rachel: Why wouldn’t you put your hand up in school?

Whetū: Just fearful of being wrong, I think. Yeah fearful of being wrong ... some of its embarrassment. Like when you're Year 9 you're still in the cool stage. You're totally cool. So, you don't ask questions or anything like that.

In her role as an instructor, in particular reference to working with young people, I asked Whetū how she approaches and assesses a new group of students:

Whetū: You can pick ... who in the room who is going to be hard to deal with, harder to engage with, off the bat, I think. The first 10 minutes for me and I know okay one, two, three at the back, I can already tell, you're going to be harder for me to connect with.

Rachel: What do you do about that situation?

Whetū: I usually bring them in. For example, if I'm setting up a class and I see ... two in the back row and I can see that their body language is a little bit different than the other girls at the front. I will kindly, without them actually knowing ... that I am on to them, I'll engage them. So, I'll somehow swindle it ... crack a joke, make them laugh, get them helping me.

When asked if humour was a characteristic, she thought exemplary AE teacher should have she replied "I think they [AE tutors] need to have humour, I had teachers who had humour ... you need to have personality. It's a lost cause if there's no personality."

I was interested to know if Whetū remembered any of the curriculum content from her time in AE. It appeared that she remembered more how she felt about the work than what work she did:

"I can't remember it all, I do remember some of the work yeah ... I remember it never being too much, it was actually fine ... you never felt like you were shit and you were going to fail; and you could always ask questions."

At the beginning of the interview, I asked Whetū what she remembered about her time in AE. She answered:

"I remember it being fun ... I remember making good friends. I remember having good teachers. Remember it being ... not like

school, not really like school. It was better than school. I just remember being a lot ... happier there than what I was at school. A lot more interested.... You walk away with the happy memories more than anything, you walk away with how you were treated.”

4.4.2 Mahuika’s Data Story

Mahuika – Goddess of Fire in Māori mythology

Mahuika’s Journey into Alternative Education

Mahuika is a female in her 30s who is identified as being of both Māori and Pacific Island descent. Mahuika was younger than when she started AE as a 13-year-old, having been expelled from secondary school. She started to talk about herself

“I just wasn’t a very good kid ... the icing on the cake was when I had a fight with this other chick, and I just didn’t really enjoy it [school] anyway. So yeah, my whole attitude was just shitty.”

Due to being so young when she started, Mahuika stayed at her AE course for about three years, which a relatively long time for any student to attend an AE programme:

“It was the bomb. It was the best. Honestly it was so good, and you know coming from school, where I hated every aspect of it ... to coming there and still getting the benefits of an education, in a different way ... yeah, it was great.”

These days Mahuika is a stay-at-home mother of three. She had long aspired to become a youth worker. As her youngest child is getting older, she has started thinking about working towards her goal again. Her desire to be a youth worker dates back to when she was expelled from school in Year 9. When asked what about this profession appeals to her, she replied, “because I’ve been that kid. I’ve been ... that child who needs someone like me.”

Exemplary Teachers

Mahuika couldn’t think of any teachers she had at primary or secondary school who might be considered exemplary. However, she was able to think of one primary school teacher who she did not like, Mahuika talked about this teacher who she felt was targeting her and shaming her in school:

“I had this one teacher, Mrs E. She was horrible, honestly, she was

horrid ... she just use to pick on me.... She knew I wasn't ... into, like, talking in front of a lot of people ... but she always sort of picked me out ... if there was something that she could see that I didn't understand she would ask me anyway. So, yeah, I hated her."

The Head: What Exemplary AE Teachers Know

Mahuika thrived in the AE environment and attributes this to her relationships with the team of tutors. She described one of the benefits of having access to a team of educators from a young person's perspective:

"The different personalities that come from all four of the tutors ... if one of the students couldn't relate to one of them, they sure as hell would find one out of the other three that they could confide in or get what they needed from them."

Mahuika's offered advice in reference to how teachers should view and manage poor student behaviour. Mahuika believed that teachers "need to see more than face value," to dig deeper and gain an understanding of what triggers might have led to the behaviour. Mahuika suggested that this is the best approach to both manage the behaviour but also to strengthen the relationship between the teacher and the student.

The Heart: What Exemplary AE Teachers Believe

When reminiscing about the different tutors Mahuika had during her years in AE she was complimentary about all except one tutor, "*Hone* was a bit of a [laughs and makes noise] he was alright, but he was a pushover."

Tutor Hone was referenced again later in the interview when Mahuika talked about her first impressions of her AE tutors:

"I could tell ... the day I walked in there ... what tutors I could get away with shit with, and what tutors I couldn't. And that was just ... how they engaged with the kids or ... when we were having group discussions ... how they ... just spoke or carried themselves ... but you know for instance Hone and Whina, two totally different people. We could get away with murder with Hone, I wouldn't even try it with Whina. She wouldn't have to do much really, she kind of had to look at me at a certain way ... I respected her, because of the way she was,

she didn't put up with shit from anybody that's why I'd take Hone for a ride [laughs] ... if you're not a strong person I'm gonna take the piss out of you [laughs]."

Mahuika talked about the other attributes of her AE tutors and her impressions about their motivation and passion for their work. In her answer we were also reminded that her experience of school means that her perception of the traditional teacher-student relationship is negative and hierarchical in nature. She explained her feelings toward her tutor as below:

"They're [AE tutors] real compassionate people ... you knew they weren't just in the job for the job title ... they actually did it for the love of it which was different to what I think that teachers are like ... for AE I guess it's more of like a personal level feel ... not that teacher-student type thing."

Mahuika was asked to elaborate on her idea of the traditional teacher-student relationship and she gave her thoughts on some of the reasons why she felt this connection was not as strong in the mainstream school setting:

"Coming from school ... you don't really get a chance to build a relationship with your teachers because there's so many other students and ... you're going from class to class when you're in AE you spend so much more time with them individually, and as a whole, that they really get to know you and you really get to know them I felt ... like they really cared ... they showed you respect and in turn ... you did the same for them ... whereas at school ... you do as your told because this is what happens here I guess it was that level of respect and communication and everything else that came from the tutors, you know towards all the students."

The Hand: What Exemplary AE Teachers Do

Mahuika felt that "what makes the best teachers" is the sense that the teacher has some personal experience of the student's world. Mahuika talked about the assumptions she would make about the life experiences of Māori or Pacific Island teachers:

"There is a difference ... coming from a Māori or Pacific Island background themselves. They understand ... they might have had friends that were naughty ... and seen that side of things ... family

environments and everything that comes from being a Māori or Pacific Island person is a lot different, in my eyes, to being you know European or Pākehā.”

In fact, there were only two places at mainstream school that Mahuika felt that she belonged: Māori language class and kapa haka. When asked to give further comment on why this might be, she responded:

Mahuika: Just because you know the teachers who were there, obviously, were Māori ... they just had a different take on things. So, they weren't like “so I'm the teacher you're the student” that type of thing, it was more like a whanau sort of environment.

Rachel: What does that look like? If someone was looking in what would they see in a whanau environment in a classroom?

Mahuika: There's no “I'm up here and your down there” sort of thing ... and just compassion like understanding not just “oh you're not listening so get out of the classroom.” It's like “hang on a minute, why aren't you listening? What's wrong? Is there something going on for you that you want to talk about?”

Mahuika talked about the importance of teachers having a sense of humour where again she merges familial references with the AE environment:

“When you're spending so much one-on-one time with the kids ... five days a week, same set of kids, every single day ... you can't be serious all the time... It's like a family, are you serious all the time with your own family?”

While Mahuika was in AE one of the tutors had a baby and for a period of time when she returned to work brought her baby to course with her. Mahuika talked about this experience from a young person's perspective:

“I've always had I've always had that mother hen thing about me anyway ... so it was just cool, and it never interfered with anything ... it wasn't like she was so busy being a mum that she kind of just didn't worry about the students.”

When asked what her AE tutors would do in the face of serious misconduct of the young people Mahuika responded:

“They [the tutors] just take them [student] away ... they would never embarrass them in front of anybody, yeah, it was always be behind closed doors that they would deal with it. ... Take them outside ... they’d stand and talk to them or they’ll let the be for a minute and then kind of approach them.... It wasn’t sort of “don’t talk to me like that, get here you’re going to time out” type of stuff, it was more like treating them with a whole lot of respect, I guess.”

Mahuika has no recollection of what curriculum content she learned in AE; it was the relationships that were forefront in her memory:

“The friendships that I built and the relationships with the tutors ... to this day like Whina, for instance, 17 years on you know we still talk and stuff like that ... if there’s anything that I needed I know that I could always go to her. So that’s like lifelong stuff, you know?”

Mahuika still has contact with some of the friends she had made in AE. Only a few days before the interview Mahuika had caught up with two brothers who had also attended AE with her, one of the things they talked about was “all the cool stuff that we did on there.” When asked what specific activities Mahuika remembers she responded, “I remember the camp ... laser strike, movies, heaps of stuff.”

At this point of the interview, I explained the concern some people have about programme like AE where youth-at-risk are brought together en masse, and she shared her thoughts:

“We were all the same ... we were all ‘that naughty kid’ ... if I hadn’t had been through that whole situation myself, I would have thought the same thing “oh my god, why would you do that? Why would you take this naughty kid and this naughty kid and put them in the same room together? ... they’re just going to be bad together” and in actual fact it’s not like that ... because you’ve experienced pretty much a lot of the same things as the next person ... you can sort of bring yourself back and do it together as a group; and think ... we’ve already done all that [played up] so now it’s time to settle down.”

Mahuika briefly touched on what was happening at home during the years she was in AE, she

mentioned “family violence” and “drinking all the time, every day.” For Mahuika her AE course was more than a classroom, “that [AE course] was sort of my safe haven ... no matter what was happening on the outside, when I would go there every day, it would be gone for five hours.”

4.5 Summary

Despite stemming from different vastly experience bases and perspectives, there were a number of commonalities in the beliefs, understandings and opinions of the six participants outlined in this chapter. The commonalities were arranged under subheadings reflecting the content and direction of each of the semi-structured interviews and covered the key areas of exemplary AE teacher knowledge, beliefs and practices. These commonalities have been coded into categories, merged into themes and are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In writing chapter two of this thesis, I experimented with a number of frameworks that I felt best captured the key ideas, themes and findings of the literature review. Eventually, I settled on Sergiovanni's (2007) head, heart and hand framework, whilst this model proved effective in organising the main elements of the literature review, it also reflected the three key components of both research questions. In chapter four, I presented a data story for each of the six research participants. In presenting each of the data stories I refrained from attempting to arrange these within a rigid set of subheadings, I allowed the unique experiences and interview direction taken by each participant to dictate the shape of their narrative. Again, I consistently found the head, heart and hand framework a useful tool in recording the findings for all six interviews. In this chapter, I bring together the findings from both chapter two and four and align the data to the research questions. Below we see the head, heart and hand framework explicitly incorporated into the two research questions:

- 1) What are the understandings (head), beliefs (heart) and practices (hand) of highly effective teachers of at-risk secondary students?
- 2) How teacher knowledge (head), mindsets (heart) and strategies (hand) can help to engage Aotearoa New Zealand's most educationally disconnected secondary students?

A rudimentary search of the internet uncovers a number of ways in which this framework has been adapted to reflect particular contexts with variations in the order of the three key dimensions. I also chose a deliberate order for the head, heart and hand framework specific to this project. This thesis is concerned with exemplary teacher practice and this practice is underpinned by a teacher's knowledge and beliefs – the head and the heart. These inform, and are evident in, the practice of the exemplary teacher – the hand. Macfarlane (2019,) adapted Sergiovanni's (2007) head, heart and hand framework and complemented it with uniquely New Zealand language and understandings. I have chosen to adopt this twist on the framework and align the head, heart and hand framework with Māori terminology and concepts:

The Head (Mātauranga: knowledge, wisdom, understanding)

What exemplary AE teachers know

The Heart (Kaupapa: purpose, passion, vision, values)

What exemplary AE teachers believe

The Hand (Tikanga: methods, techniques, practice)

What exemplary AE teachers do

Under each of the three key areas, I have fashioned six generalised statements, a total of 18 statements, to represent the key findings of this research. These statements were generated during the data collation and analysis process in line with grounded theory methods. Each statement is a compilation of words and ideas offered by the six research participants. In this chapter, each statement is described and discussed in relation to the data generated in this research and, where relevant, the literature in chapter two was considered.

5.2 The Head (Mātauranga: Knowledge, Wisdom, Understanding)

This section refers to what exemplary AE teachers know, and suggests six groups to categorise the things that exemplary teachers know

5.2.1 They know they don't necessarily know how to teach the student sitting in front of them

Exemplary teachers of at-risk learners approach each student they encounter with genuine curiosity, understanding that they do not yet know this young person's worldview, experiences, interests or motivations. In Macfarlane's (2007) behaviour compass, a framework capturing key guiding principles in supporting learner behaviour, behaviours that can be categorised as severe or serious are likely to be a result of "environmental and psychological factors" (p. 173). Teachers should seek to understand the student from a holistic perspective paying attention to the social, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of the young person (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2007; Macfarlane, 2009). The exemplary AE teacher's curiosity extends beyond how the young person comprehends text or processes a maths equation. It is founded on the understanding that each student cannot be viewed in isolation and are a product of their environment including the values and norms of the student, their family, their peer group, and their wider community. This idea was touched on by all six research participants implicitly or explicitly.

In order to get to know their students exemplary AE teachers ensure that they do not filter what the student is saying through their own understanding of the world (Flynn, 2014). When getting to know the student exemplary AE teachers listen to more than what they young person is saying. AE teachers understand that their students are likely to have been let down by the adults in their lives and trust does

not always come easily. Pūmahara explained that this could mean that the student is not forthcoming with what they are really thinking and feeling requiring the teacher to be critical of their own interpretation of what a young person is saying with their words or their actions.

Exemplary teachers are not attached to traditional views of the teacher role and are comfortable admitting they don't have all the answers, taking the position of the learner. They embrace the concept of ako and, as Matatau advises "chuck aside their ego", supporting the student to become the teacher. When the teacher is open to learning from and about the student, they put themselves in the best position to assess and recognise the student's strengths. These strengths and needs may or may not be academically based.

The understanding that the teacher does not already have all the answers extends beyond how to teach the individual but also how best to meet the needs of the wider group. Exemplary AE teachers approach each day without concrete expectations about how the lesson or the day might proceed. Pūmahara recommends teachers approach each day with "zero expectations" and an ability to be "versatile" in their thinking and their approach to teaching. Exemplary AE teachers are flexible and reflective in their practice and understand that an approach that has worked in the past is not indicative of long-term effectiveness.

5.2.2 They know that what works well for these learners would work well in mainstream and not the other way round

This understanding is common amongst educators who work with minority groups including learners with special needs. I first came across this concept many years ago at a professional development course for teachers of students with specific learning difficulties, namely dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and dysgraphia. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning were meeting the needs of most learners, however, they did not meet the needs of students with these specific learning difficulties. The course instructor explained that the teaching approaches and techniques being advised at the course would be of great benefit to learners with learning disorders but would also be beneficial for learners of all abilities. Two of the research participants talked about this understanding in reference to other minority groups of learners; Matatau applied this understanding when making connections between autistic students and AE students; Anahera spoke of this same principle regarding meeting the learning needs of Māori students.

Exemplary AE teachers are willing and able to reassess, and possibly disregard, the instructional practices that they have practiced for many years as teachers. They may also choose to steer clear of current fads and trends in education in the interest of meeting the needs of the students in front of them. A theme within the literature reviewed for this thesis presented mastery goal orientation

as far superior to a performance goal orientation (Ames, 1992; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Pūmahara had to revise and adjust his own approach to teaching maths, originally sitting within a mastery goal orientation, when he entered alternative education. Pūmahara employed the “inverted funnel” approach to teaching maths, where students were given a prescriptive, step-by-step approach to solving maths problems. Using this approach Pūmahara found that students were able to experience success in applying the set formula and that this was conducive to engagement and progress. With a genuinely student-centred approach to curriculum delivery rigid long-term plans and curriculum schemas become redundant in favour of a tailored curriculum responsive to what the students need in order to succeed.

5.2.3 They know themselves and they consistently turn up as themselves

In summarising the attributes of alternative education tutors Schoone (2017) discussed the importance of tutor authenticity. In his research into Auckland alternative education tutors Schoone (2017) found that “students respond positively to tutors who are securely and genuinely themselves” (p. 69). Exemplary teachers of at-risk learners have a strong sense of self. They demonstrate insight into their own character, abilities, values and identity. These teachers do not simply have knowledge of self, but they also consistently align this understanding with what they say and, most importantly, what they do in the classroom setting. In other words, they are authentic, they are real, they are who they say they are.

Exemplary AE teachers are comfortable with sharing their imperfections and flaws as teachers, and perhaps as people. Walker (2008) identifies the ability to admit one’s mistakes as one of 12 characteristics of effective teachers. Exemplary teachers of at-risk learners declare their lack of knowledge, admit their mistakes and apologise when they get it wrong. This demonstration of humility helps young people see their teacher as a person and normalises and accepts vulnerability.

To be inauthentic as a teacher in the AE setting, would also be futile. Almost all of the research participants talked about youth-at-risk as being highly perceptive, insightful and often underestimated. Pūmahara warns that it takes a lot of energy to act in conflict with one’s own values and principles, energy that AE teachers can ill afford to waste. Therefore, being aware and acting from one’s own ethical base and beliefs is important in building and maintaining teacher resiliency.

5.2.4 They know their own personal and professional limitations and are skilled at working within a collaborative team of other adults

Exemplary AE teachers understand that they cannot, and should not, be everything that a young person needs. Three of the six participants referred to a strength-based approach where teachers balance their own skills and abilities with the skills and abilities of their immediate teammates and the wider multi-disciplinary team. This requires these teachers to know how and when to enlist the knowledge

and skills of their teammates and other professionals and experts, for example when they need cultural advice and guidance or clinical expertise.

Exemplary AE teachers know that there is an art to building and maintaining an effective team in an education setting. Matatau explained that the complementary roles and responsibilities of team members stretch beyond formal qualifications and professional titles. These less formal roles and responsibilities should be based on the strengths of the individual team members and might utilise recognise interpersonal skills, organisational skills, leadership skills, conflict resolution, or creativity.

There are a number of benefits in establishing an effective collaborative team in an education setting. AE teachers and students often liken the AE group to an extended family, a whānau. One benefit of this model is that the students have a number of adults to call on for their differing needs, whether they be academic or pastoral needs as would be evident in an extended family model. Much like a family, when the adults in the AE setting are a high functioning and cohesive team the benefits flow on to the young people too.

Klem and Connell (2004) recommended that developing “small learning communities” (SLCs) where groups of teachers take “collective responsibility for learning” (p. 271) resulting in a significant improvement in student engagement and achievement. The AE teacher and leader participants in this study explain that within a team environment teachers are also able to access collegial support to enhance their own wellbeing. This may come in the form of light-hearted banter, healthy debate, or peer supervision. The success and effect of these forums is based on effective collegial relationships and a common understanding of the work and its unique challenges. Support can also be accessed in the event of students becoming agitated or heightened where a teacher with a particularly good rapport with a young person may be best placed to deescalate the young person. This support may also come in the form of a team member who will be most effective in managing aggression and risk in the event that physical intervention is required.

5.2.5 They know what is happening in students’ lives beyond the classroom and strategically adapt their approach, curriculum content and anticipated outcomes to reflect this knowledge

Macfarlane (1997; 2007) stated that teachers’ ability to get to know their students outside the classroom is of utmost importance to optimise learner engagement and achievement. Macfarlane suggested that, although all students would benefit from this approach, learners with behavioural difficulties stand to gain the most. Exemplary AE teachers understand that students’ lives, outside of the classroom setting, have a powerful impact on their ability to engage in learning.

Brooking et al. (2009) cited violence in the home, gang affiliations, child welfare involvement,

and sexual abuse as the norm within AE students' homes and communities. Exemplary AE teachers treat knowledge of such issues as privileged knowledge and treat it with great care and sensitivity. Knowledge of their students' personal lives and home situation must be matched with the teacher's ability to modify how they engage with the young person regarding what and how the young person is expected to learn and perform.

In order to access their student's personal world exemplary AE teachers build trust with their students and their students' families, peer group and wider community. The process of gaining this knowledge and the process of building trust occurs simultaneously. This process that is establishing a trusting relationship with a young person, who has likely been let down by other adults in their lives, is a fine balance. Macfarlane (2007) warned that learners experiencing difficulties in the school setting may come from families with histories of intergenerational disengagement and negative experiences of conventional schools. Consideration to previous experiences should be applied to engaging with both the wider peer group and family as they are likely to have had experiences that make them suspicious of teachers and other professionals.

Exemplary AE teachers are tuned into their student's normal way of being and patterns of behaviour. This sensitivity gives teachers the ability to recognise when a young person is out of sorts and may be struggling. Once an AE teacher becomes aware of a potential issue, they give careful thought about the best time, place and manner in which to approach their concerns. It may be the exemplary AE teacher's judgement that raising the issue and would cause more harm than good; therefore, the teacher may decide to use less direct ways of supporting the young person.

5.2.6 They know the risk

Working in alternative education means exposure to a world where gangs, violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse and suicide are commonplace (Brooking et al., 2009; Jones, 2011; Watson, 2011). In an environment where such issues are prevalent, exemplary AE teachers understand that this work leaves themselves and the students in their care is open to emotional and physical risk.

Exemplary AE teachers know how to assess, manage and respond to physical risk. Inevitably AE teachers will need to address the antisocial and aggressive behaviours of their students. They are tuned into the warning signs and have strategies to keep themselves safe. Even when a teacher has an excellent relationship with a student, Matatau points out that these teachers are always aware of the risk that they could be the person that the young person lashes out at, either verbally or physically.

Exemplary teachers of at-risk students are aware of their own personal issues and employ strategies to mitigate the risk of these affecting their work and their wellbeing. Pūmahara warns that

when working with youth-at-risk teachers may find themselves supporting a student who is dealing with an issue that is unresolved for the teacher themselves. Exemplary AE teachers know when to step back, ask for help and allow their colleagues to support them.

The impact of genuine care for students in relation to exemplary teacher practice is evident throughout the literature reviewed for this thesis (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Glenn, 2013; Macfarlane, 2007; Schoone, 2017; Walker 2008). Exemplary AE teachers do not simulate building strong relationships with their students, they genuinely care for these young people. Inherent in this dynamic is the risk to the teacher's emotional wellbeing when the young people are hurt by others or hurt themselves. The two exemplary AE teachers interviewed for this research were both adamant that clinical supervision for AE teachers should be compulsory.

5.3 The Heart (Kaupapa: Purpose, Passion, Vision, Values)

This section refers to what exemplary AE teachers believe and suggests six groups to categorise exemplary AE teachers' beliefs.

5.3.1 They love their work and believe that they can make a difference, but do not think that they have been sent to save the world

Macfarlane (2004, as cited in Macfarlane, 2007) described effective teachers as “emanating an enthusiasm that ripples out to others” (p. 139). Exemplary AE teachers are passionate about the work they do, and they want to be there (Schoone, 2016). They believe that what they do in their work makes a difference in the lives of youth-at-risk, but they do not believe they should, or that they can, save these young people. During their interviews two of the research participants made the latter assertion without prompting before I registered that this may become a notable aspect of exemplary AE teacher practice.

Pūmahara and Matatau both talked about tutors who wanted to “save” youth-at-risk. For Matatau the idea that a person can or should save young people sits in direct conflict with his beliefs around the need for AE tutors to “chuck aside their ego.” His concern with practitioners who want to “save the world” is that their focus is on themselves and not what the young person needs. Pūmahara warned a teacher holding the idea that they are going to save these young people is at risk of being narrow minded. Matatau talked about these teachers becoming “static” in their own development. Both Pūmahara and Matatau discussed the risks of a “save the world” mindset in relation to resilience: “you’re going to get discouraged, people are going to let you down, you’re going to get hurt by the kids” (Matatau), “it will demolish you; you will not build resilience” (Pūmahara).

Exemplary AE teachers know that the lessons and benefits of attending AE may not become evident until long after the young person leaves AE. Using the analogy of the Polynesian navigators Matatau explains that AE teachers may not get to see the last two percent of the journey where the destination appears over the horizon and the young person begins to thrive. Whetū gives a real-life example of how the experience and learning from AE can positively impact a young person's life when, years after leaving AE, she studied to become a teacher and went on to become a successful business owner working with children and young people.

When a young person, under the age of 16 years old in Aotearoa New Zealand is no longer able to attend mainstream school their options are very limited. As the old saying goes: the devil finds work for idle hands, and young people who are not attending school are perfectly placed to engage in wrongdoing. Sometimes the most significant thing that AE programmes can do is to provide young people with a place to be. Former AE student Whetū acknowledged that her situation could have been a lot worse had she not attended AE as a young person, and Pūmahara stated that “the number one outcome is simply to get the kids to a safe place ... nine in the morning until three in the afternoon the fact that you’ve got them there you save society itself.”

5.3.2 They believe students are doing the very best they can with the tools they have, and they do not personalise students’ behaviour

Exemplary AE teachers know that many of their students have experienced complex trauma and have not yet developed the ability to process perceived threats or distress in a constructive way. This knowledge enables the teacher to understand that antisocial behaviours, although sometimes directed at the teacher, are not about the teacher themselves. Exemplary teachers know to look beyond the face value of poor behaviours and recognise that the antecedent is likely to be a result of something much deeper than the apparent trigger (Macfarlane, 2007).

With this knowledge exemplary AE teachers are able to remain calm in the midst of chaos and, in the first instance, assess their own safety and the safety of their students. These teachers do not immediately look to impose a consequence for poor behaviour. They give the student the time and space needed to move their mind to a place where they can engage and are receptive to a restorative process.

Working in alternative education means working alongside some of Aotearoa New Zealand's most vulnerable communities, contending with serious threats to young people's wellbeing. These threats include poverty, substance abuse, violence, and gang involvement just to name a few (Brooking et al., 2009; Jones, 2011; Macfarlane, 2007; Snook & O'Neill, 2014; Watson, 2011). Amongst such serious circumstances AE teachers use humour to demonstrate and to strengthen their own humility. This humility shows the students that their teachers do not take themselves too seriously and gives the

teachers a break from the heavy issues they are required to deal with in their work. Walker (2008) identified teachers' ability to admit when they make mistakes as one of the characteristics of effective teachers. Aroha and her team practice this also in demonstrating humility and role modelling the act of apologising.

A strong theme within the literature pertaining to meeting the educational needs of marginalised students is exemplary teachers having high expectations for their students. (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Clark et al., 2010; Glenn, 2013; Klem and Connell, 2004; Macfarlane, 2007; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Schoone, 2017; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Walker, 2008; Watson 2011). However, Pūmahara suggested that exemplary AE teachers approach each day with "zero expectations" cognisant that a lot can happen overnight in the life and circumstances of an AE student.

5.3.3 They like their students and believe their students are capable and competent and have mana

It may seem a given that teachers like children and young people, but our this is not reflected in the experiences of our two former AE students. They did not get a sense that their schoolteachers liked them nor did the AE student participants in Brooking et al. (2009). However, a common theme amongst the disengaged students both in the literature and in the interviews is that they felt cared for by the educators in their alternative learning settings (Brooking et al., 2009; Watson, 2011). Exemplary AE teachers give their students the sense that they are in their corner, that they care for them and enjoy their company. They demonstrate this when they take an interest in the young person's life, when they laugh and are friendly, and when they are kind and compassionate.

Exemplary teachers of at-risk learners know that their students bring their own knowledge and experience base and are experts in areas that their teacher may have limited understanding of. Bishop and Glynn (2000) describe an abundance of benefits for learner engagement when teachers employ a constructivist approach "which see learners as coming to an educational experience with a wealth of information and experience of their own" (p. 6). Exemplary AE teachers can see more than the students' academic abilities and are able to identify students' talents and attributes from a holistic perspective, they acknowledge and celebrate these. The research participants talked about some unique qualities they feel are prevalent amongst AE students. Anahera talked about strengths such as their ability to care for younger family members while Matatau listed a number of these attributes when he said, "their bullshit radar detector is amazing" and "they're so much more resilient, stronger than a lot of kids in mainstream". He also commented on their emotional intelligence "they can read people, they can read situations, they can read environments."

Exemplary teachers of at-risk learners reject deficit thinking about their learners (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). Anahera and her team of AE tutors demonstrated this by not giving great weight to students' school files detailing the poor decisions and actions of their recent past. Anahera intentionally disregarded the labels placed on AE students and works with the young person in front of her.

Almost all of the research participants talked about how perceptive AE students are, perhaps the most adamant about this point were the two former AE students. Exemplary AE teachers do not underestimate their students' capabilities. Teachers demonstrate that they genuinely recognise and value their students' abilities when they make them partners in their learning journey and give the students a voice (Flynn, 2014; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Yazzie-Mintz, 2009).

Matatau observed an exemplary AE teacher giving mana to his students, recognising their value and potential, and in turn the students recognised their teacher's mana. Mahuika spoke of a similar dynamic when she explained that her AE tutors gave her, and her peers "respect" and the students responded by respecting the tutors.

5.3.4 They have empathy for their students, but they do not pity them. They have empathy, but these people are not pushovers

Dropping out of school, can be symptomatic of a number of contributing factors including medical, psychological, cognitive, and emotional issues, as well as dysfunction within the home, school, social and communities' environments (Brooking et al., 2009; Jones, 2011; Macfarlane, 2007; Snook & O'Neill, 2014; Watson, 2011). Exemplary AE teachers know that many of their students are dealing with significant challenges in their home lives and carrying their own heavy reputations and labels as a result of past actions. These teachers have empathy for their students, but they do not pity them. The temptation to feel sorry for these young people is held at bay by the genuine belief that their students are far more than their circumstances and school files would suggest.

Exemplary teachers care deeply about their students, but they are not pushovers. Twice during her interview Whetū talked about her AE tutors having a balance of "sternness" and "love." When Mahuika first spoke of an AE tutor that she considered to be exemplary it was regarding the tutor's ability to communicate her expectations and command respect. Although this AE tutor is described as being staunch and tough, we later hear about her with reference to her ongoing relationship and support of Mahuika, even into her adult years.

5.3.5 They challenge their own beliefs, the beliefs of the students', and they challenge the system

Ihi (assertiveness) is one of seven elements subsumed within the Hikairo Rationale

(Macfarlane, 2007). This element “refers to the ability people have to act in their own and others interests, to stand up for their beliefs without undue anxiety, to express honest feelings comfortably, or to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others” (Alberti & Emmons, 1986, as cited in Macfarlane, 2007, p. 127). Within the Hikairo Rationale *ihi* is balanced with warmth and *aroha* (Macfarlane, 2000). Exemplary AE teachers demonstrate *ihi* and *aroha* when they challenge the students and, occasionally, the other professionals and systems working with the young people and their families.

Exemplary AE teachers challenge unacceptable student behaviour, they are neither punitive nor permissive (Macfarlane, 2007). Teachers’ ability to effectively manage classrooms and student behaviour is regarded as particularly important in the eyes of Māori and Pacific Island learners (Bishop et al., 2014; Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa’afoi, Taleni & O’Regan, 2009; Macfarlane, 2007; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Spiller, 2012). AE teachers’ abilities to manage the behaviour of some of Aotearoa New Zealand’s most resistant learners is based upon a strong teacher – student relationship and is mindful of maintaining the student’s *mana*. Often these approaches include giving thought to where, when, and how they challenge the behaviour. The physical location, whenever possible, is usually away from the group. The time, if circumstances allow, is once the young person is calm and likely to be receptive. The way in which the tutor would address the behaviour was specific to the preferences of the student and largely determined by the teacher – student relationship.

Exemplary AE teachers don’t just challenge student behaviour, they also challenge students’ worldview. AE students often see people in authority positions such as teachers in a negative light. Exemplary AE teachers challenge the students view of themselves as learners by creating opportunities for students to experience success in the classroom (Curwin, 1994). Walker (2008) identified compassion and forgiveness as characteristics of effective teachers. AE tutors challenge their students’ ideas about teachers when they don’t hold a grudge for a student’s previous misdemeanour, and they don’t give up on the student when the student goes off course. They show students that they are a person before they are a teacher by being themselves in the classroom setting and sharing personal experiences (Schoone, 2016).

In some cases, AE student develop their perspectives on relationships based on dysfunctional norms of how families interact, how to parent, and what loving relationships look like. AE tutors often challenge these perceptions by involving their own friends and families within the AE setting and role modelling a different way of being. When teachers have established a trusting relationship with students, they are more likely to gain access to the student’s worldview and are in a position to challenge these ideas directly.

AE tutors work within an AE tutor team but also work within a multidisciplinary team involving youth workers, social workers, health experts, and other professionals. Occasionally AE teachers need

to challenge the other professionals working with AE students and their wider family. It is not unusual for the different components of a multidisciplinary team to approach their work with the young person with differing objectives, priorities and agendas. Exemplary AE teachers hold other professionals to account when they believe the person, or organisation, to be working against what is in the best interests of the young person. Exemplary AE teachers do this without assigning blame and without diminishing the other persons mana, a skill Matatau wished he had developed earlier in his career.

Exemplary AE teachers challenge themselves to persevere and continue to show up. Aroha spoke about AE tutors needing the “grit” to persevere in the role especially at the beginning when getting to know the setting and the young people. Aroha warned that it can take months before a new AE tutor is fully accepted, or even tolerated, by the students. Pūmahara struggled for the first two years familiarising himself with this unique environment and adapting his practice to meet the needs of these students.

5.3.6 They believe there are many variations and models of life, and there is no ‘one’ pathway or solution to achieve a life well-led

Within the literature considered for this thesis a theme emerged where standardised assessment, rigid assessment conditions and national standards of achievement are viewed as working against student motivation and achievement (Ames, 1992; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Schoone, 2016; 2017; Smith, 2001; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Exemplary AE teachers are not attached to the status quo. They reject one-size-fits-all approaches to teaching, learning, achievement, and life in general. Despite pressures to deliver quantifiable, nationally recognised achievement results AE teachers appreciate there are more important achievement outcomes than those set by those in power. Exemplary AE teachers support learners to co-design and achieve outcomes that prioritise the young person’s specific needs and interests.

Matatau, Aroha and Pūmahara all agreed that exemplary AE teachers do not have to be Māori or of Pacific Island descent in order to meet the needs of Māori and Pacific Island learners. They do, however, need to have a strong sense of their own identity and be open to learning about other cultures. Exemplary teachers have a good grasp of Aotearoa New Zealand’s unique bicultural identity, this is essential for all New Zealand teachers but particularly important in AE where more than 60 percent of the national AE student cohort identify as Māori. Macfarlane (2007) recommended all teachers working in the Aotearoa New Zealand context get to know their local iwi, hapū, and community as a priority. This culturally responsive approach gives teachers insight into, and an appreciation for, the wider school community including their language, customs and values. This knowledge can be used to enrich the physical learning space, curriculum content, and the teacher-student relationship supporting optimal engagement and achievement.

5.4 The Hand (Tikanga: Methods, Techniques, Practice)

This section refers to what exemplary AE teachers do and suggests six groups to categorise their practices.

5.4.1 They build powerful relationships and connections with students, students' peers, families and communities

All six participants in this study placed the greatest importance on establishing and maintaining a positive student-teacher relationship. The literature considered in this study also reiterated the powerful impact the teacher-student relationship has on student engagement and achievement (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Bishop et al., 2014; Brooking et al., 2009; Brewster and Fager, 2000; Curwin, 1994; Fletcher et al., 2009; Glenn, 2013; Jones, 2011; Klem and Connell, 2004; Macfarlane, 1997; 2007; Macfarlane, 2012; Magen-Nagar & Shachar, 2017; Popp et al., 2011; Snook & O'Neill, 2014; Walker & Graham, 2019; Watson, 2011). Exemplary AE teachers are skilled at connecting with young people. They recognise that these students may have been let down or hurt by the adults in their lives. These may be adults in the home or professionals involved with the young person and their family. With this understanding exemplary AE teachers go about building trust with the young person. The first stage in building trust with AE students is giving the young person the clear message that the teacher welcomes contact. Teachers communicate this message by being friendly and kind in whatever way is best suited to their usual style of relating. Youth-at-risk can be highly perceptive and are constantly assessing their environment, and the people in it, making judgments about potential threats and where and with whom they can relax. Exemplary AE teachers are aware of this when inducting a new student into the group with the goal of building trust.

Having indicated to the young person that they welcome contact, the teacher then affords the student time and space to respond to or initiate engagement with the teacher. The teacher must wait patiently for the young person to want this connection, Pūmahara described this process:

“You have to wait for that moment and that moment is really strange because it's very amorphous. You need to feel it, that this is the moment to connect with them and you must understand that that initial connection is very tenuous because they are very fragile people.”

An important part of the process is the young people being able to see their teachers as people, Pūmahara describes this stage of relationship development from his own experience of working with AE students, “I know our relationship has transcended to a level where we are beginning to see each other as human beings.” Māori or Pacific Island teachers may be able to establish this connection faster

with some young people. Both of the two former students interviewed for this research identified as being of Māori and Pacific Island descent and both felt they connected more readily with teachers of the same ethnicity. This was based on assumptions made by the students that Māori or Pacific Island tutors have had similar life experiences and backgrounds and therefore a natural insight to the young people struggles and challenges. The former students also made similar assumptions about AE tutors who were young in age and tutors who dressed casually.

Exemplary AE teachers connect with their student's family and wider community. The understanding that young people must be viewed as an extension of their wider environment is both implied and explicitly expressed throughout the literature and all six interviews (Bishop & Glynn, 2000; Macfarlane, 2007). Exemplary AE teachers engage with their student's family and wider community, they also recognise the powerful influence of the students' peer group (Macfarlane, 2007). The AE tutors make family involvement a priority and an expectation from their very first contact with new students. They create opportunities and events where families can attend and celebrate their young people's progress and achievements, these events always involve food.

5.4.2 They create a safe place, a place of refuge, a culture and climate that allows students to detox from the chaos in their lives

Exemplary AE teachers know that their students home lives are often chaotic and stressful, and the young people need some respite. Being referred to AE means that something has gone drastically wrong in the student's school experience and this itself is likely to have caused tension in the home long before the young person was referred. When a young person is excluded from school it is likely to be a symptom of more serious factors in the young person's home life.

Exemplary AE teachers establish a learning space that counteracts the chaos and unpredictability of the young people's lives outside the classroom. Predictability can be given in the form of set classroom routines and in how the teachers respond to the students. The literature reviewed for this research indicates that Māori, Pacific Island and other marginalised groups of students respond best to teachers who have strong classroom management skills and clear classroom expectations and routines (Bishop et al., 2014; Brooking et al., 2009; Fletcher et al., 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004; Macfarlane, 2007; Popp et al., 2011; Singh & Sinclair, 2001; Spiller, 2012).

Exemplary AE teachers provide a learning environment that gives students the options to best meet their learning preferences and needs. They acknowledge that some students need a quiet space, giving the student the advice and permission to be in their own company. This idea was explored when Mahuika theorised that AE students are often actually introverts living in an extroverted and chaotic world. They also know that other students learn best in a dynamic learning environment that includes

movement, noise and conversation. Whetū explained that one of the main reasons she struggled in mainstream high school was the restricted and stagnant learning spaces. Bishop & Berryman (2009) stated that effective teachers use social interaction in the learning environment, giving students opportunity to share their knowledge.

Exemplary teachers use the safe learning environment they create, and the classroom culture they foster, as a foundation for delivering a rich curriculum. When AE students feel safe at their AE course it's a good indication that they trust the adults in charge. When young people feel safe their brains are open to learning. Whetū remembered that she felt she could ask questions and do the work in AE, this sat in contrast to her experience of mainstream high school where she felt she couldn't ask questions in class. Whetū's experience is indicative of findings within the literature that explain that learners are more likely to take risks in their learning when they felt safe in the classroom environment (Fletcher et al., 2009; Macfarlane, 2007).

AE teachers are highly unlikely to be able to establish a completely harmonious learning environment. However, if they can create a space where the young people feel safe, they can teach the young people life lessons in this authentic setting. In the AE setting tutors can support young people to process grief, conflict, and a host of other emotions and behaviours that children usually learn when they grow up in a stable and healthy home.

5.4.3 They design resources and are resourceful

Alternative education students have a fraught relationship with school and fractured educational history. Many AE students have significant gaps in their learning. Some AE students have diagnosed learning disabilities and, it is suspected, many more have undiagnosed neurological disorders. Teaching and learning resources provided to mainstream schools are not provided to AE programmes. If an AE programme is able to access these resources, they are often not designed for the age and range of abilities found in most AE classrooms. These resources are almost never designed to reflect AE student's cultural context. For this reason, exemplary AE teachers create their own teaching and learning resources to best suit the needs and interests of their students that, as Matatau said, bring "learning to life." Bishop & Berryman (2009) called for "pedagogical imagination" mirroring a theme within the literature where exemplary teachers exhibit creativity in being responsive to the needs and interest of their students (Brewster & Fager, 2000; Schoone, 2016; Watson, 2011).

Exemplary AE teachers look for ways to enhance and supplement the resources available to AE students by enlisting the help of good people and opportunities within their local community. This means that exemplary AE teachers need the ability to be inspired, creative, and willing to ask for help.

5.4.4 They carefully tailor their approach to suit the relationship between the teacher and the student, enhancing the student's mana never diminishing it

Exemplary AE teachers establish powerful relationships with their students and adapt their teaching style to complement and reinforce this connection. They intentionally act to enhance their student's mana (Macfarlane, 2007). Mahuika provided an excellent example on the impact of teachers who act to diminish their student's mana when she spoke about the only teacher she clearly remembered from her primary school years. Mahuika perceived that this teacher intentionally called on her in class when she knew that Mahuika didn't know the answer and was deeply uncomfortable talking in front of the class. This experience was mirrored by the AE students interviewed in Brooking et al. (2009) where the students felt unfairly targeted and expressed strong negative feelings towards these teachers. Exemplary AE teachers design and assign learning activities with an agenda to positively reinforce young people's self-efficacy, so that they see themselves as full of potential with the absolute ability to learn and achieve.

Exemplary AE teachers recognise when young people are unable to manage their own emotions or deal with life's challenges in a constructive way. These teachers give their students the time and space they need, and when they are ready, they challenge the young person's behaviour away from the eyes and ears of others. These teachers know when a young person is not open to talking and they back-off when a student indicates they need space. Macfarlane (2007) recommends that teachers act to foster aroha in the classroom setting, mana enhancing practice described as "having clear rules and expectations and stating these in a consistent manner without intimidating or degrading students."(p. 42)

Exemplary AE teachers actively value AE students work output and progress by providing frequent feedback and affirmation. They always respond positively to students' questions and requests for help (Brewster & Fager, 2000). Whetū placed great importance on her ability to ask questions and complete the work set at her AE programme. Setting learning activities that are challenging yet achievable is considered an important ability of exemplary teachers (Ames, 1992; Brewster & Fager, 2000; Watson, 2011). Exemplary AE teachers do their very best to give feedback and assistance as soon as they possibly can, because they know that AE students can be incredibly impatient and often become anxious if they do not receive immediate gratification, acknowledgement or assistance.

Humour is a powerful tool for exemplary teachers of at-risk learners (Macfarlane, 2007; Schoone, 2016; Watson, 2011). Humour is used to create laughter and light-heartedness to counteract the students' cultural norm where being tough and stoic is an expectation. However, humour is always used carefully and strategically in a way that does not diminish the student's mana. It is never used to

shame or humiliate young people (Macfarlane, 2007). Exemplary AE teachers know that shaming students serves only to destroy trust and is ineffective in supporting behavioural change. If young people perceive that educational institutes, and the people in power within those institutes, are stomping on their dignity or their mana they are likely to retaliate with defiance (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Sennet and Cobb, 1972, as cited in Watson, 2011)

5.4.5 They anchor students with a sense of belonging

Exemplary teachers of at-risk learners understand that students' families do not necessarily fit the traditional, nuclear model. Many AE students come from broken homes; many live with a grandparent. Anahera reminds us that it is not unusual for AE students be in state care having limited or no contact with their family members. For many youth-at-risk the people they consider to be family are in fact not blood relatives at all. Anahera talked about the importance that AE teachers place on involving family in the AE programme in whatever form the family takes. However, there are challenges in seeking to connect family in this context, it is in fact near impossible for some of young people.

Alternative education programmes operate more in line with primary schools than traditional secondary school models where learners move around the school encountering a number of different classes and different teachers throughout the school day. In AE, students stay with the same group of tutors and peers throughout the school day, which is regarded as more conducive to building caring environments and has potential to improve students' engagement and achievement (Bishop & Berryman, 2009; Klem and Connell, 2004). Cultivating a sense of belonging is identified in the literature as an important ability of effective teachers, however, it is viewed as even more crucial for marginalised students (Brooking et al., 2009; ERO, 2011; Jones, 2011; Macfarlane, 2007; Popp et al., 2011; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012; Walker, 2008). Exemplary AE teachers foster a sense of belonging by creating a family dynamic. In an AE family group there are adults, the tutors, who care for the young people and for each other. There are young people who, like siblings, constantly move within a continuum ranging from harmonious coexistence to discordant rivalry. This family dynamic is reinforced when the tutors bring their own friends and family into the AE space where the young people are able to observe normal, healthy family dynamics in action. This family dynamic is beneficial for all AE students but particularly crucial for the AE students who are estranged from their own whānau.

Exemplary teacher of at-risk learners create opportunities for their students to strengthen and celebrate their cultural identity. Fox, Neha and Jose (2018) place great importance on “encouraging rangatahi Māori to become more engaged and embedded within their culture” (p. 20). Fox et al. (2018) suggest that a strong cultural connection helps Māori youth strengthen resilience and wellbeing by developing adaptive coping strategies. Anahera and Aroha noted that many AE students of Māori

descent have little or no connection to their culture and act to remedy this by incorporating Māori language, customs and genealogical knowledge within a culturally responsive curriculum (Macfarlane, 2007).

Whetū did not feel like she belonged in school, in fact she felt invisible. She felt as though no one would notice if she did or did not turn up, so she stopped turning up. Both former AE student participants spoke about being cared for by the tutors and about making lifelong friendships with the other students. Mahuika talked about the benefits of the AE students acting as a collective, supporting one another to embrace their second chance at gaining an education.

5.4.6 They create opportunities for fun and laughter, giving students a bank of happy memories to anchor them in tough times

Exemplary AE teachers know that how they teach their students is more important than what they teach their students. Neither of the former AE students remembered a great deal about the curriculum content of what they were taught in AE. Both former students clearly remember how they were treated and the connections they made with their tutors and the other students.

Exemplary AE teachers know that students carry a heavy load. They are weighed down with trauma, dysfunction, betrayal and the burden of the reputation they themselves created, built on their own actions. Exemplary AE teachers don't just provide a physical safe haven for their students, they also provide emotional refuge and respite. They allow these young people, who deal with adult issues and adult dysfunction, the opportunity to be children. These teachers laugh, play, and have fun alongside their students, and everyone is better off for it.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter as a summative statement acknowledges the limitations of the study and responds to these limitations by proposing opportunities for further research. The chapter concludes with a final nod to the research questions and the research findings that seek to answer these questions, considerations and implications for practice.

6.2 Limitations of the Research and Ideas for Further Research

The most notable limitations of this study reflect the limitations inherent within small scale research projects and the confines of master's level research set forth by the university. The prescribed timeframes and size requirements for this study outlined by the university were a key consideration from its inception. These expectations and requirements needed to be balanced against the theoretical and methodological aspirations of the research project whereby the six participants were held up as experts in the area of student disengagement. Therefore, the participants data stories needed to be accurately presented, often using their own vernacular, with the participants intended meaning and the importance they placed on their messages being a priority concern.

Logistical considerations were also factored in from the planning stages of this research. For example, using a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis, participant accessibility was a key consideration. This factor considered, alongside the importance placed on kanohi-ki-te-kanohi contact within a kaupapa Māori approach to research (Nepe, 1991; Torepe, 2011), was given priority over the geographical spread of the participants. Grounded theory is said to be complete when theoretical saturation occurs, when no new concepts are emerging from the data and the theory has been thoroughly validated (Glasser & Strauss, 2017). Without time, size and logistical limitations the findings generated from this study could have been tested against more participants from a wider demographic base. These participants could have been sourced from across Aotearoa New Zealand, and perhaps beyond, venturing outside the field of alternative education including exemplary teachers of disengaged learners from residential schools, the youth justice sector and innovative initiatives existing within communities and mainstream secondary schools.

The interviews, and the data stories participants generated, reached into areas that sat outside the scope of this study such as factors that strengthen teacher resilience and teacher recruitment practices and considerations. Despite not being directly related to the research questions it became obvious that these themes should be included in chapter four for a number of reasons. Most

significantly, the participants placed great importance on caring for and supporting the wellbeing of exemplary AE teachers and the unique considerations when recruiting teachers within the specialist field of alternative education. The significance of these ideas could be further explored.

6.3 Concluding Statement and Considerations for Practice

Despite a myriad of policies, initiatives and strategies dedicated to the issue of Aotearoa New Zealand's much-lamented tail of educational underachievement this blight continues to thrive. For the most part the uneven distribution of educational success in this country means that students of Māori and Pacific Island descent, learners from low socioeconomic communities, and learners with specific learning difficulties are being failed by the education system. There is an urgent need for new solutions and approaches to challenge this system that is not meeting the needs of our most marginalised young people. This research sought to identify the attributes and practices of exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most educationally disengaged secondary school students. It recognised and was to celebrates the mana of these practitioners and the important work they do within this countries most marginalised and vulnerable communities.

In chapter five I presented a synthesis of the research findings in the form of generalised statements arranged under three key domains capturing exemplary AE teacher knowledge, beliefs and practices. This content explicitly answered the first research question regarding what the understandings, beliefs and practices of highly effective teachers of at-risk secondary students are. Incorporated into the discussion of each of the 18 generalised statements are the implicit answers to the second research question regarding how teacher knowledge, mindsets and strategies can help engage Aotearoa New Zealand's most educationally disconnected secondary students. Here the rationale and research behind each of the 18 statements were combined, explored and presented to challenge educators and reflect on their own practice. It is hoped these findings provide fresh insight and food for thought regarding how the educational needs of disengaged learners are met.

Last but not least, it worth mentioning that educational disengagement is a complex issue and requires us to view these young people from a holistic perspective. The experts in the area of educational disengagement interviewed for this research did not restrict their opinions and insight to the technical skills and knowledge of exemplary teachers of at-risk learners. Their data stories reflect the holistic approach that they all agree exemplary teachers must employ. The exemplary teaching practice described by the six research participants provides an excellent example for all teachers but is of particular importance for teachers of at-risk learners. These teaching practices are underpinned by a particular set of beliefs and understandings. The findings of this research project regarding exemplary

teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most disengaged secondary school students suggests that more recognition and value be placed on distinctly different knowledge, mindsets and practices.

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Glossary of Māori Terms

Note: The definitions included here relate to the use of the terms within this thesis. Other definitions exist for other contexts and dialects.

Ako (ākona)	reciprocal learning relationship between teacher and student
Aroha	love, compassion, warmth
Hapū	subtribe
Hui	come together, meeting
Ihi	being assertive
Iwi	tribe
Kanohi-ki-te-kanohi	face-to-face
Kapa haka	Māori performing arts
Kaumātua	elder, person with status within the community
Kaupapa	ideology, topic, agenda, purpose, passion, vision, values
Kaupapa Māori	Māori ideology
Mana	status, prestige, influence
Manaaki	care for others
Manaakitanga	caring
Mana whenua	local iwi or hapū that have historic and territorial rights over a particular area of land
Marae	formal meeting place
Mātauranga	knowledge, wisdom, understanding
Mihimihi	speech of greeting
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
Pepeha	saying of the ancestors
Rangatahi	young people
Rangatira	to be of high rank, chiefly
Taonga	treasure
Te ao Māori	the Maori world
Tikanga	methods, techniques, practice
Tīpuna	ancestor
Whakapapa	genealogy
Whanaungatanga	close connections between people
Whānau	family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people or a group of people who feel closely connected
Whānau hui	family meeting
Whakapapa Māori	Māori ancestral links

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter and Information Sheet for AE Leaders



College of Education, Health and Human Development

Telephone:

Email: rachel.maitland@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

October 2019

ERHEC Ref: 2019/64/ERHEC

Exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most disengaged secondary school students

Tēnā koe

My name is Rachel Maitland and I am a Master of Education Student at the University of Canterbury. My research aims to identify the characteristics and practices of exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most educationally disengaged secondary school students.

You have been nominated by a peer or colleague to take part in this study because of your experience and expertise as a leader in the field of alternative education who can give insight into what makes an exemplary teacher of disengaged young people. I have asked the person who nominated you to give you this information sheet and consent form. Please read both carefully and contact me within one week of receiving these documents if you are interested in participating in this research project and/or if you have any questions about the research.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will include:

- Participation in a semi-structured interview. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded. The interview will take place at a time and venue convenient to you; this could be your home, the University of Canterbury, or another venue of your choice. The interview is semi-structured and therefore does not have any concrete questions but will include themes such as:
 - ⇒ Your roles, experience and length of service in alternative education
 - ⇒ Examples and descriptions of some of the most memorable AE teachers/educators that you have encountered
 - ⇒ What you consider to be the mindsets of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ What you consider to be the dispositions of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ What you consider to be the skillsets of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ What you would expect to observe in the practice of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ In recruiting what qualifications, life experiences or qualities do you look for in prospective AE teachers/educators?
 - ⇒ Barriers and limitations faced by exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ Anything you would like me to know about what makes an exemplary teachers/educators of disengaged learners not already covered in the interview
- Further questions may be asked as you respond. Clarification may be sought around statements or

points you have made. You may pass on any question that you do not wish to answer. At the conclusion of the interview you will be reminded of your participant rights including confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

- You will be asked to choose a pseudonym. I ask that you use pseudonyms if discussing former colleagues or young people in your interview. I ask that you do not discuss the identity of any person you nominate to participate in this research project. Please note that due to the voluntary nature of this study, and a set limit on the number of participants, not all nominations will result in participation in this study. I will not discuss whether or not you chose to participate in this research with the person who nominated you.
- I may ask to re-engage with you after the interview in order to clarify or discuss emerging ideas further. If required this will occur within one month of your interview and will be arranged at a time and means of communication convenient for you, i.e. phone conversation, video conference or meeting. You have the right to decline this additional contact at any time.
- Check the transcript of your interview. The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be generated. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you, please check the transcript carefully. This gives you an opportunity to ensure your intended messages are accurately recorded and that you are completely comfortable with the information you have shared.

During the interview we will delve into your thoughts, perceptions, and experiences in alternative education. It is acknowledged that there may be some risk of distress while sharing your experiences. In order to minimize this risk, it will be made clear prior to the interview that you do not have to answer any question you are not comfortable answering, and if you feel any distress during the interview, the interview will be stopped and only continued with your verbal consent. After the interview I will provide you with a booklet. In this booklet you will find a directory of helplines and local mental health service contact details.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results. The final date for withdrawal will be one month from the date you receive a copy of the interview transcript. Interviews will be taking place in October, analysis of raw data will begin in Oct/Nov. You can expect to receive the transcript of the interview within two weeks of your interview, and you will have two weeks from the time you receive the transcript for contacting me to clarify or omit any parts of the transcript.

The results of the project may be published, but you can be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation, your identity will not be made public. To ensure confidentiality pseudonyms will be used and any details that could lead to the identification of participants will be altered or omitted from publication. All data collected for the study will be kept in password protected electronic form (hard-copy files will be scanned) until the research project is complete and for five subsequent years, at which time it will be destroyed. Data collected will only be accessible to myself and my supervisors, if a transcriber is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. I will take the utmost care to protect the confidentiality of all data gathered in this study and your identity in the publication of its findings. However, please note there is the possibility for a reader to guess identities. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project. Please also indicate on the consent form if you are willing to re-engage with me in the one-month period after the interview to discuss emerging ideas.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for the degree of Master of Education under the supervision of Mr Te Hurinui Clarke and Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane, who can be contacted at tehurinui.clarke@canterbury.ac.nz and sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

Ngā mihi nui

Rachel Maitland

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study please complete the attached consent form and return it either in the envelope provided, scanned email or given in person.

Appendix B: Letter and Information Sheet for AE Teachers



College of Education, Health and Human Development
Telephone:
Email: rachel.maitland@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
October 2019
ERHEC Ref: 2019/64/ERHEC

Exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most disengaged secondary school students

Tēnā koe

My name is Rachel Maitland and I am a Master of Education Student at the University of Canterbury. My research aims to identify the characteristics and practices of exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most educationally disengaged secondary school students.

You have been nominated by a peer or colleague who describes you as an exemplary practitioner in the field of alternative education who can give insight into what makes an exemplary teacher of disengaged young people. I have asked the person who nominated you to give you this information sheet and consent form. Please read both carefully and contact me within one week of receiving these documents if you are interested in participating in this research project and/or if you have any questions about the research.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will include:

- Participation in a semi-structured interview. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded. The interview will take place at a time and venue convenient to you; this could be your home, the University of Canterbury, or another venue of your choice. The interview is semi-structured and therefore does not have any concrete questions but will include themes such as:
 - ⇒ The circumstances that led to your involvement in alternative education
 - ⇒ Your friends, whānau, colleagues' thoughts about you working in AE
 - ⇒ Your roles, experience and length of service in alternative education
 - ⇒ Your beliefs about teaching disengaged students and how to best meet their needs
 - ⇒ What you consider to be the dispositions of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ The pedagogical beliefs that underpin your practice
 - ⇒ What would I see and hear if I were to visit your classroom?
 - ⇒ Career highlights
 - ⇒ Professional learning and development, qualifications
 - ⇒ Barriers and limitations faced by exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ What you would like all teachers/educators to know about teaching disengaged students
 - ⇒ Anything you would like me to know about what makes an exemplary

teachers/educators of disengaged learners not already covered in the interview

- Further questions may be asked as you respond. Clarification may be sought around statements or points you have made. You may pass on any question that you do not wish to answer. At the conclusion of the interview you will be reminded of your participant rights including confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
- You will be asked to choose a pseudonym. I ask that you use pseudonyms if discussing former colleagues or young people in your interview. I ask that you do not discuss the identity of any person you nominate to participate in this research project. Please note that due to the voluntary nature of this study, and a set limit on the number of participants, not all nominations will result in participation in this study. I will not discuss whether or not you chose to participate in this research with the person who nominated you.
- I may ask to re-engage with you after the interview in order to clarify or discuss emerging ideas further. If required this will occur within one month of your interview and will be arranged at a time and means of communication convenient for you, i.e. phone conversation, video conference or meeting. You have the right to decline this additional contact at any time.
- Check the transcript of your interview. The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be generated. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you, please check the transcript carefully. This gives you an opportunity to ensure your intended messages are accurately recorded and that you are completely comfortable with the information you have shared.

During the interview we will delve into your thoughts, perceptions, and experiences in alternative education. It is acknowledged that there may be some risk of distress while sharing your experiences. In order to minimize this risk, it will be made clear prior to the interview that you do not have to answer any question you are not comfortable answering, and if you feel any distress during the interview, the interview will be stopped and only continued with your verbal consent. After the interview I will provide you with a booklet. In this booklet you will find a directory of helplines and local mental health service contact details.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results. The final date for withdrawal will be one month from the date you receive a copy of the interview transcript. Interviews will be taking place in October, analysis of raw data will begin in Oct/Nov. You can expect to receive the transcript of the interview within two weeks of your interview, and you will have two weeks from the time you receive the transcript for contacting me to clarify or omit any parts of the transcript.

The results of the project may be published, but you can be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation, your identity will not be made public. To ensure confidentiality pseudonyms will be used and any details that could lead to the identification of participants will be altered or omitted from publication. All data collected for the study will be kept in password protected electronic form (hard-copy files will be scanned) until the research project is complete and for five subsequent years, at which time it will be destroyed. Data collected will only be accessible to myself and my supervisors, if a transcriber is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. I will take the utmost care to protect the confidentiality of all data gathered in this study and your identity in the publication of its findings. However, please note there is the possibility for a reader to guess identities. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.

Please indicate on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project. Please also indicate on the consent form if you are willing to re-engage with me in the one-month period after the interview to discuss emerging ideas.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for the degree of Master of Education under the supervision of Mr Te Hurinui Clarke and Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane, who can be contacted at tehurinui.clarke@canterbury.ac.nz and sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

Ngā mihi nui

Rachel Maitland

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study please complete the attached consent form and return it in the envelope provided envelope provided, scanned email or given in person.

Appendix C: Letter and Information Sheet for Former AE Students



College of Education, Health and Human Development
Telephone:
Email: rachel.maitland@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
October 2019
ERHEC Ref: 2019/64/ERHEC

Exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most disengaged secondary school students

Tēnā koe

My name is Rachel Maitland and I am a Master of Education Student at the University of Canterbury. My research aims to identify the characteristics and practices of exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most educationally disengaged secondary school students.

You have been nominated by a professional in the field of alternative education (AE) as a former student who experienced success in AE and in life beyond AE who can give a unique perspective into what makes an exemplary teacher of disengaged young people. I have asked the person who nominated you to give you this information sheet and consent form. Please read both carefully and contact me within one week of receiving these documents if you are interested in participating in this research project and/or if you have any questions about the research.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will include:

- Participation in a semi-structured interview. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded. The interview will take place at a time and venue convenient to you; this could be your home, the University of Canterbury, or another venue of your choice. The interview is semi-structured and therefore does not have any concrete questions but will include themes such as:
 - ⇒ The circumstances that led to your involvement in alternative education
 - ⇒ Your experiences in mainstream school and the teachers that made an impression on you
 - ⇒ Your experiences in alternative education and the teachers that made an impression on you
 - ⇒ The differences between the AE teachers/educators and other teachers you had previously encountered
 - ⇒ What you remember most about your AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ Your interactions and relationship with your AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ The kind of schoolwork your AE teachers/educators gave you and how did he/she support you with your learning
 - ⇒ Your AE teachers approach to managing difficult situations or behaviours

- ⇒ The behavioural expectations your AE teachers/educators had of you and the other students
- ⇒ What your AE teachers/educators could teach other teachers about working with young people
- ⇒ Anything you would like me to know about what makes an exemplary teachers/educators of disengaged learners not already covered in the interview

- Further questions may be asked as you respond. Clarification may be sought around statements or points you have made. You may pass on any question that you do not wish to answer. At the conclusion of the interview you will be reminded of your participant rights including confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
- You will be asked to choose a pseudonym. I ask that you use pseudonyms if discussing former colleagues or young people in your interview. I ask that you do not discuss the identity of any person you nominate to participate in this research project. Please note that due to the voluntary nature of this study, and a set limit on the number of participants, not all nominations will result in participation in this study. I will not discuss whether or not you chose to participate in this research with the person who nominated you.
- I may ask to re-engage with you after the interview in order to clarify or discuss emerging ideas further. If required this will occur within one month of your interview and will be arranged at a time and means of communication convenient for you, i.e. phone conversation, video conference or meeting. You have the right to decline this additional contact at any time.
- Check the transcript of your interview. The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be generated. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you, please check the transcript carefully. This gives you an opportunity to ensure your intended messages are accurately recorded and that you are completely comfortable with the information you have shared.

During the interview we will delve into your thoughts, perceptions, and experiences in alternative education. It is acknowledged that there may be some risk of distress while sharing your experiences. In order to minimize this risk, it will be made clear prior to the interview that you do not have to answer any question you are not comfortable answering, and if you feel any distress during the interview, the interview will be stopped and only continued with your verbal consent. After the interview I will provide you with a booklet. In this booklet you will find a directory of helplines and local mental health service contact details.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results. The final date for withdrawal will be one month from the date you receive a copy of the interview transcript. Interviews will be taking place in October, analysis of raw data will begin in Oct/Nov. You can expect to receive the transcript of the interview within two weeks of your interview, and you will have two weeks from the time you receive the transcript for contacting me to clarify or omit any parts of the transcript.

The results of the project may be published, but you can be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation, your identity will not be made public. To ensure confidentiality pseudonyms will be used and any details that could lead to the identification of participants will be altered or omitted from publication. All data collected for the study will be kept in password protected electronic form (hard-copy files will be scanned) until the research project is complete and for five subsequent years, at which time it will be

destroyed. Data collected will only be accessible to myself and my supervisors, if a transcriber is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. I will take the utmost care to protect the confidentiality of all data gathered in this study and your identity in the publication of its findings. However, please note there is the possibility for a reader to guess identities. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.

Please indicate on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project. Please also indicate on the consent form if you are willing to re-engage with me in the one-month period after the interview to discuss emerging ideas.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for the degree of Master of Education under the supervision of Mr Te Hurinui Clarke and Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane, who can be contacted at tehurinui.clarke@canterbury.ac.nz and sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

Ngā mihi nui

Rachel Maitland

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study please complete the attached consent form and return it in the envelope provided by envelope provided, scanned email or given in person.

Appendix D: Letter and Information Sheet for Alternative Education Centres



College of Education, Health and Human Development
Telephone:
Email: rachel.maitland@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
October 2019
ERHEC Ref: 2019/64/ERHEC

Exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most disengaged secondary school students

Tēnā koe

My name is Rachel Maitland and I am a Master of Education Student at the University of Canterbury. My research aims to identify the characteristics and practices of exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most educationally disengaged secondary school students.

One of your staff members has been nominated by a peer as a professional in the field of alternative education who can give insight into what makes an exemplary teacher of disengaged students. This staff member has indicated that they are interested in participating in the research project but requires consent from you as his/her employer.

Participation in this research project will include:

- Participation in a semi-structured interview. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be audio recorded. The interview will take place at a time and venue convenient to the participant; this could be their home, the University of Canterbury, or another venue of their choice.
- The interview is semi-structured and therefore does not have any concrete questions but will include themes such as:
 - ⇒ The participant roles, experience and length of service in alternative education
 - ⇒ Examples and descriptions of some of the most memorable AE teachers/educators that the participant has encountered
 - ⇒ What the participant considers to be the mindsets of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ What the participant considers to be the dispositions of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ What the participant considers to be the skillsets of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ What the participant would expect to observe in the practice of exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ In recruiting what qualifications, life experiences or qualities would the participant look for in prospective AE teachers/educators?
 - ⇒ Barriers and limitations faced by exemplary AE teachers/educators
 - ⇒ Anything the participant would like me to know about what makes an exemplary

teachers/educators of disengaged learners not already covered in the interview

- Further questions may be asked as the participant responds. Clarification may be sought around statements or points the participant has made. You may pass on any question that you do not wish to answer. At the conclusion of the interview the participant will be reminded of their participant rights including confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
- Participants will be asked to choose a pseudonym. I ask that participants use pseudonyms if discussing former colleagues or young people in their interview. Education centres will not be named or identified.
- I may ask to re-engage with the participant after the interview in order to clarify or discuss emerging ideas further. If required this will occur within one month of their interview and will be arranged at a time and means of communication convenient for you, i.e. phone conversation, video conference or meeting. You have the right to decline this additional contact at any time.
- Check the transcript of their interview. The interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be generated. A copy of the transcript will be sent to the participants to check carefully. This gives the participant an opportunity to ensure their intended messages are accurately recorded and that they are completely comfortable with the information they have shared.

During the interview we will delve into participants thoughts, perceptions, and experiences in alternative education. It is acknowledged that there may be some risk of distress while sharing your experiences. In order to minimize this risk, it will be made clear prior to the interview that participants do not have to answer any question they are not comfortable answering, and if they feel any distress during the interview, the interview will be stopped and only continued with their verbal consent. After the interview I will provide participants with a booklet. In this booklet participants will find a directory of helplines and local mental health service contact details.

Participation in this study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Participants may ask for their raw data to be returned to them or destroyed at any point. If participants withdraw, I will remove information relating to them. However, once analysis of raw data starts, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of their data on the results. The final date for withdrawal will be one month from the date participants receive a copy of the interview transcript. Interviews will be taking place in October, analysis of raw data will begin in Oct/Nov. Participants can expect to receive the transcript of the interview within two weeks of their interview and will have two weeks from the time they receive the transcript for contacting me to clarify or omit any parts of the transcript.

The results of the project may be published, but participants can be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation, their identity will not be made public. To ensure confidentiality pseudonyms will be used and any details that could lead to the identification of participants will be altered or omitted from publication. All data collected for the study will be kept in password protected electronic form (hard-copy files will be scanned) until the research project is complete and for five subsequent years, at which time it will be destroyed. Data collected will only be accessible to myself and my supervisors, if a transcriber is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. I will take the utmost care to protect the confidentiality of all data gathered in this study and participants' identity in the publication of its findings. However, please note there is the possibility for a reader to guess identities. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.

Please indicate on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project. Please also indicate on the consent form if you give permission for the researcher to access the education centre site in the event that the participant request to be interviewed at their place of work.

The project is being carried out as a requirement for the degree of Master of Education under the supervision of Mr Te Hurinui Clarke and Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane, who can be contacted at tehurinui.clarke@canterbury.ac.nz and sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

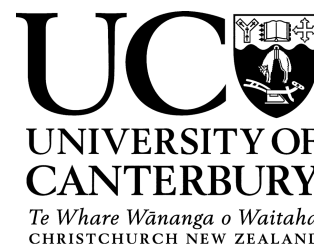
Ngā mihi nui

Rachel Maitland

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study please complete the attached consent form and return it in the envelope provided envelope provided, scanned email or given in person.

Appendix E: Consent Form for Participants



College of Education, Health and Human Development

Telephone:

Email: rachel.maitland@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Exemplary Teachers of New Zealand's Most Disengaged Secondary School Students

Consent form for participants

- ☐ I have been given a full explanation of this project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in this research project.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information I have provided should this remain practically achievable.
- ☐ I understand that the final date of withdrawal will be one month from the date I receive a copy of my interview transcript for review.
- ☐ I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants or their institution.
- ☐ I understand, and will abide by, the conditions of confidentiality outlined in the information letter. I understand that identifying information will be changed or not included in the published research to protect confidentiality.
- ☐ I understand that if a transcriber is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.
- ☐ I understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ I understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in password protected electronic form (hard-copy files will be scanned) until the research project is complete and for five subsequent years, at which time it will be destroyed.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher may request to re-engage with me within a one-month period after the interview to in order to clarify or discuss emerging ideas further. I understand that I have the right to decline this additional contact at any time.
- ☐ I understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be managed.
- ☐ I understand that I am required to use pseudonyms if discussing former colleagues or young people during the course of this research project. I will not discuss the identity of any person I nominate to participate in this research project.
- ☐ I understand that I can contact the researcher (Rachel Maitland, rachel.maitland@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisors Mr Te Hurinui Clarke and Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane, tehurinui.clarke@canterbury.ac.nz.

sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

- ☐ I would like a summary of the results of the project. I have provided my email details below for this.
- ☐ By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Email address (for transcription and summary of findings):

Please return this completed consent form to Rachel Maitland in the envelope provided envelope provided, scanned email or given in person.

Appendix F: Consent Form for Education Centre



College of Education, Health and Human Development

Telephone:

Email: rachel.maitland@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Exemplary Teachers of New Zealand's Most Disengaged Secondary School Students

Consent form for education centres

- ☐ Education Centre Management have been given a full explanation of this project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand what will be required of the staff member if the staff member agrees to take part in this research project.
- ☐ Education Centre Management gives permission for the researcher to access the education centre site in the event that the participant requests to be interviewed at their place of work.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand that participation is voluntary and that the staff member may withdraw at any stage without penalty. Withdrawal of participation will also include the withdrawal of any information the staff member has provided should this remain practically achievable. The final date of withdrawal will be one month from the date the staff member receives a copy of their interview transcript for review.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand that any information or opinions the staff member provides will be kept confidential to the researcher and her supervisors and that any published or reported results will not identify the participants or their institution.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand the conditions of confidentiality outlined in the information letter. Education Centre Management understand that identifying information will be changed or not included in the published research to protect confidentiality.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand that if a transcriber is used, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand that a thesis is a public document and will be available through the UC Library.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand that all data collected for the study will be kept in password protected electronic form (hard-copy files will be scanned) until the research project is complete and for five subsequent years, at which time it will be destroyed.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand that the researcher may request to re-engage with the staff member within a one-month period after the interview to in order to clarify or discuss emerging ideas further. The staff member has the right to decline this additional contact at any time.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand the risks associated with taking part and how they will be

managed.

- ☐ Education Centre Management understand that the staff member is required to use pseudonyms if discussing former colleagues or young people during the course of this research project.
- ☐ Education Centre Management understand that they can contact the researcher (Rachel Maitland, rachel.maitland@pg.canterbury.ac.nz) or supervisors Mr Te Hurinui Clarke and Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane, tehurinui.clarke@canterbury.ac.nz, sonja.macfarlane@canterbury.ac.nz) for further information. If Education Centre Management have any complaints, Education Centre Management can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).
- ☐ Education Centre Management would like a summary of the results of the project. We have provided email details below for this.
- ☐ By signing below, Education Centre Management agree to the staff members participation in this research project.

Name: _____

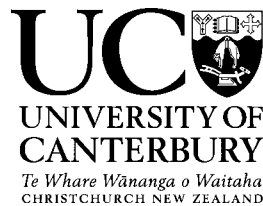
Date: _____

Signature: _____

Email address (for summary of findings): _____

Please return this completed consent form to Rachel Maitland in the envelope provided envelope provided, scanned email or given in person.

Appendix G: Transcription Confidentiality Agreement



TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Thank you for your participation in the research project **exemplary teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand's most disengaged secondary school students**. Protecting the confidentiality of the research participants is essential and you are therefore asked to sign the following confidentiality agreement.

I, _____, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regard to any and all verbal information and audio recordings received from the research team for the above project. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual and the content of any discussion that may be revealed during transcription
2. To not make copies of any audio files or computerised files of the transcribed interviews, unless specifically approved to do so by the researcher Rachel Maitland.
3. To store all audio files and materials in a password protected computer or safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all materials to Rachel Maitland in a complete and timely manner at the completion of transcription
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents or audio files from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices on completion of transcription.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audio files and/or files to which I will have access.

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____

Date _____